

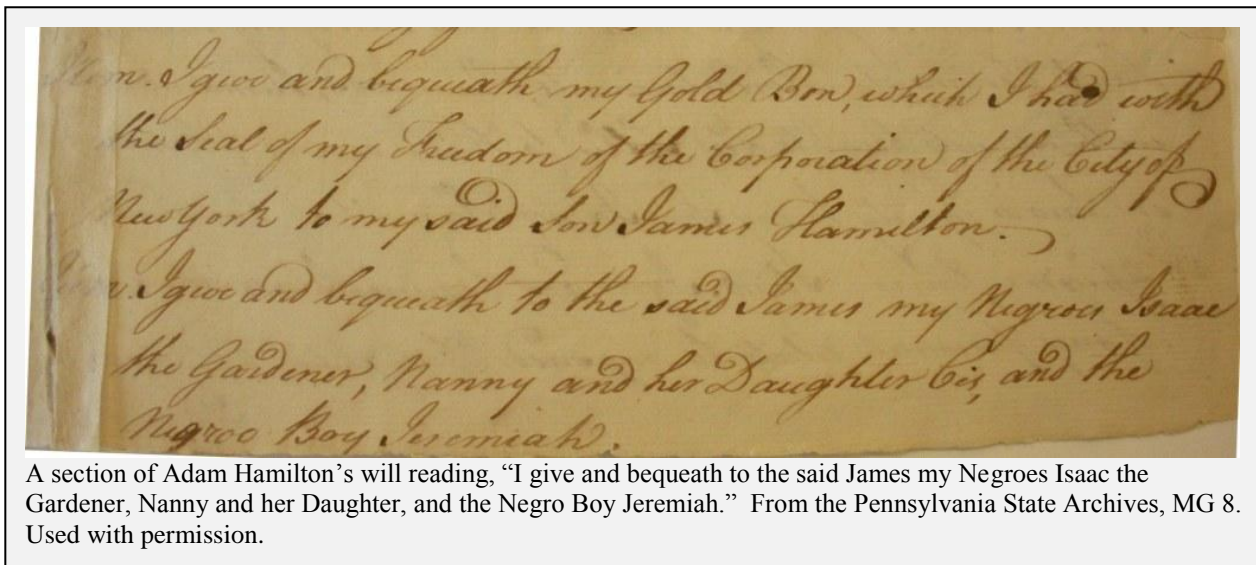
Communities in Common: **Black History in Pennsylvania study**



Chapter 1

Slavery and Resistance, 1644-1865

Chattel slavery and the long campaign against it by Americans of African descent was nothing less than a crucible in which the racial infrastructure of American culture, identity, language, imagery, and opportunity was immutably welded into a set of tropes that have since substituted for critical analysis in our society. The battle against enslavement signifies far more than black Americans standing up for themselves against injustice. It forced them to articulate a common agenda informed by their race and to develop the organizational and intellectual skills necessary to forward their cause. After the legal elimination of slavery, the same skills were turned toward addressing other injustices. The overall unity of purpose forged in resistance to the institution of slavery remained for the next century and a half through the mid—20th century battle for civil rights.



From the moment that individuals of African descent were forcibly transported to the shores of the Delaware River valley to serve as indentured servants and slaves, to the eve of the American Civil War, Pennsylvania's African Americans undertook many measures to better their lives and attain freedom in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds.

During the century, slaves in Pennsylvania challenged the system by insurrection, sabotage, and escape. Throughout much of the 18th and well into the 19th century, free African Americans in

the Commonwealth railed against the evils inherent in the practice of slavery as they participated in both interracial and independent African abolition societies that served as the vanguard in the movement to aid fugitive slaves.

It is important to recount the stories detailing the exceptional triumphs of African Americans over the forces of discrimination and racism which had operated (and, in many respects, continue to operate) on state and national levels to appreciate the complete picture of Pennsylvania's heritage.

While some of the earliest documentation regarding Africans in Pennsylvania suggests that a small number of African laborers worked as either indentured servants or as slaves for Swedish and Dutch settlers along the Delaware River as early as 1639, the first specific mention of an individual of African descent in the region did not appear until 1644. In that year, colonial records describe a ship named the Griffin (or Gripen in Swedish) that had brought at least one slave—"ein morian oder angoler"—along with Swedish settlers to the shores of the Delaware River to eke out an existence in the colony of New Sweden. The individual, named Anthony, "served Governor [Johan] Printz [1592–1663] at Tinicum," where he made "hay for the cattle" and "accompan[ied] the governor on his pleasure yacht."

Other early accounts detailing the forced arrival of Africans to the shores of the Delaware River, and to the area of what is now southeastern Pennsylvania, are contained in Dutch colonial documents, which reveal that Dutch settlers, in 1664, had drawn up an accord between the colony of New Netherland and the West India Company to supply fifty Africans to work in the low-lying regions along the river. While scholars have been unable to verify if this request was fulfilled, researchers have uncovered details concerning another of the initial occurrences of a large-scale, forced importation of Africans to work as slave labor. Twenty years later, in 1684, several years after William Penn (1644–1718) established Pennsylvania, 154 Africans disembarked from a slave ship, the Isabella, which had docked in Philadelphia. Scholar George F. Nagle explained that they "were immediately purchased by the local Quaker settlers, who were in need of manpower to help clear the land in the three year-old colony."

Penn chimed in upon the discussion surrounding the issue of slavery and servitude in the colony in 1685 by stating that he preferred employing African laborers on his farm instead of white indentured servants, because "a man has them while he lives." Penn's comments essentially confirm what scholars such as A. Leon Higginbotham Jr., have asserted of the legal status of Pennsylvania's slaves and indentured servants by the late seventeenth century and well into the 18th century: "there [was] no evidence that black indentured servants or slaves [in Pennsylvania] were held for anything except lifelong terms." Moreover, by 1700, when Pennsylvania's colonial lawmakers passed *An Act for the Better Regulation of Servants in this Province and Territories*, formal distinctions were formally made between the treatment of white indentured servants and

African slaves. Life-long servitude was legally sanctioned for Africans, and penalties such as being “severely whipped, in the most public place of the township” for “offences” were enforced with alarming regularity.²

It is important to note that a vigorous opposition to the early appearance of slavery in Pennsylvania flourished as well. Not long after the colony’s inception, four Germantown Mennonite converts to Quakerism in 1688 authored a resolution against slavery, the first of its kind in colonial America. In their petition, they avowed:

Now though they are black, we cannot conceive there is more liberty to have them slaves, as it is to have other white ones. There is a saying that we should do to all men like as will be done ourselves; making no difference of what generation, descent, or colour they are. And those who steal or rob men, and those who buy or purchase them, are they not all alike?³

In addition, Pennsylvania Quaker George Keith (1638/1639–1716) had argued as early as 1693 that “to buy Souls and Bodies of men for Money, to enslave them and their Posterity to the end of the World . . . is a great hindrance to the spreading of the Gospel.” One of the colony’s great anti-slavery crusaders, Quaker-born Anthony Benezet (1713–1784), continually spoke out against slavery, eventually becoming one of the founding members, in 1775, of the Society for the Relief of Free Negroes Unlawfully Held in Bondage (which would become known as the Pennsylvania Society Promoting the Abolition of Slavery).⁴

Appeals by these and many individuals and groups throughout the Commonwealth essentially fell upon deaf ears. Many Quakers, as well as Protestants and Catholics, continued to own slaves, or at least tacitly support slavery between 1688 and 1780, despite the passage of several statutes placing higher taxes on the importation of slaves into the colony. (It should be noted that, with the exception of one individual who was excommunicated in 1703, Mennonites did not own slaves.)



Portrait of an African American woman, n.d. From LancasterHistory.org. Used with permission.

Protests were continually levied against the practice. In 1716 and again in 1729, the Quarterly Meetings at Chester, Delaware County, attempted to bar slave owners from membership in the church, but members who possessed slaves were not officially expelled or ostracized until 1754.

In 1754, the Pennsylvania Yearly Meeting, convening in Philadelphia, enacted its first, albeit vague, set of regulations preventing slaveholders from obtaining positions of leadership if they refused to end their ties to the institution. Complete expulsion of these congregants did not occur until twenty years later, in 1774 (and only six years before many Quakers and other abolitionists helped push the 1780 Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery through Pennsylvania's legislature), when the Meeting passed an act banishing slave owners from the church. Throughout the century, a number of individuals saw little or no religious contradiction in owning slaves at all—perhaps culminating in such extreme cases as the Anglican financier of the Revolutionary War, Robert Morris (1734–1806), who had continued to worship at Philadelphia's Christ Church, while being one of the most prolific slave merchants in the city.⁵

The institution of slavery continued to grow in the Commonwealth throughout the century, peaking, according to Gary B. Nash and Jean R. Soderlund, in 1780, with 6,855 individuals held in bondage. The number of slaves in Pennsylvania in 1780 were:

939 in Philadelphia and Montgomery counties,
 520 in Bucks County, 290 in Berks County,
 493 in Delaware and Chester counties,
 838 in Lancaster and Dauphin counties,
 793 in York and Adams counties,
 1,149 in Cumberland, Franklin and Perry counties, and
 1,140 in Westmoreland, Washington, Allegheny and Fayette counties.⁶

Working in a variety of occupations in urban and rural settings, Pennsylvania's slaves toiled in iron foundries and on farms, as domestics and shipyard workers, and as skilled artisans and manual laborers. Many of these persons usually arrived in the colony either by ship or land through Philadelphia. After reaching the city, they were usually taken to the Old Slave Market near Water and Market streets or to the London Coffee House, a tavern established in 1702 at the corner of Front and Market streets. They were often displayed on platforms as property to be bought and sold at public auction. Sale advertisements regularly appeared in the *Pennsylvania Gazette*. The October 1, 1761, edition of the *Gazette* announced the arrival and sale of slaves.

Just imported in the Sloop Company, Captain Hodgson, from the
 Coast of Africa, A PARCEL OF LIKELY NEGROE SLAVES;
 Which may be seen on board said Sloop, lying off Cooper's Ferry.

For Terms, apply to SAMUEL and ARCHIBALD McCALL, and JAMES WALLACE and Company.⁷

Advertisements touted the variety of trades in which the slaves were well versed, as well as the fact that these individuals had already contracted Small Pox, so as not to scare off prospective buyers. One such notice appeared in the July 18, 1765 Pennsylvania Gazette.

TO BE SOLD, On Saturday the 27th Instant, at the London Coffee House, TWELVE or Fourteen valuable NEGROES, consisting of young Men, Women, Boys and Girls; they have all had the Small Pox, can talk English, and are seasoned to the Country. The Sale to begin at Twelve o'Clock.

On March 15, 1764, the newspaper carried an advertisement describing the capabilities of a slave being offered for sale.

TO be sold by public Vendue, at the London Coffee house, on Saturday, the 17th Instant, at Eleven o'Clock in the Forenoon, a lusty spry Negroe Man, about 30 Years of Age, is a Tanner and Currier by Trade, but is exceeding capable of learning any other Business.

Advertisements publicizing the sale of women were often demeaning, generally promoting gender and race-specific conceptions, as well as commenting upon whether or not they had a child with them—a potentially attractive incentive for buyers who saw the possibilities of exploiting more labor. The Pennsylvania Gazette of December 11, 1760, carried one such notice.

A LIKELY NEGROE WENCH, than can cook and wash, and has had the Small Pox, to be sold at public Vendue, at the London Coffee House, on Saturday the 20th Instant, at Twelve o'Clock.

On May 8, 1765, the Gazette published a similar advertisement—but made mention of a child.

TO be SOLD on Saturday next, at 12 o'Clock, at the London Coffee house, if not sold before by private Sale, a likely Negroe Woman and Child; she can cook, and do all Sorts of House Work, and is fit for either Town or Country Business. Enquire of SAMUEL SIMPSON, in Chestnut street, near the corner of Third street.⁸

Scrutinizing newspaper advertisements announcing the arrival and auction of slaves in Pennsylvania provides only a one-dimensional glimpse into the inner workings of the “peculiar institution” in the Commonwealth, which leads to an important crossroads in this study. A more telling theme can be discerned when reviewing, instead, the large number of notices placed for runaway slaves in the pages of Pennsylvania’s newspapers, along with subsequent pleas by owners attempting to reclaim their lost “property.”

These advertisements offer an understanding of who the primary instigators were in the fight for freedom in 18th century Pennsylvania: the slaves themselves. The advertisements contain a great deal of information about a slave’s life in Pennsylvania by revealing his or her occupation and skills, and whether these individuals ran away alone or in groups, in family units or with friends, or had fled with or without children. More importantly, what comes to the forefront in all of these notices is the image of a powerful individual or individuals who boldly opposed slavery.

There were many advertisements for runaway slaves, including a notice that appeared on September 4, 1746, describing the individual to be an ironworker who may have been helped, interestingly enough, by the local Catholic Church.

RUN away the 17th of August from Hereford Furnace, in the county of Philadelphia, a Spanish Negro Man, named Mona, of or abot 28 or 30 Years of Age, of middle Stature, thin Visage, very full of Flattery, apt to laugh, and talks broken English: Had on when he went away, an Oznabrigs Shirt, check’s Linen Trowsers.

It was also noted that Mona “had some money suppos’d to be given to him by the Papist Priest,” an obvious slur directed at the Catholic minority by those who believed Catholics were akin to savages, a phenomenon that lasted throughout the nation well into the 20th century.

In another advertisement for a slave that escaped alone, an individual named Jeremy escaped from Richard Britton in Middletown Township, Bucks County. Jeremy was described as “6 feet high . . . a hole in each ear, and scars cut on each arm.” In addition, he was wearing “a pale blue homespun Cloth Coat, red Flannel Jacket and Breeches and an old Beaver Hat.” A detail also described Jeremy’s ingenuity and skills, declaring that he “understands making Corn Baskets, and it is supposed he will go about to sell them.”

According to one announcement, it’s obvious that the African American community had helped a slave to safety. On September 1, 1763, a woman, Phebe, ran away from the “subscriber” from his residence in Marcus Hook, Chester County. Phebe had “a small Stature” and often wore “a handkerchief” around her head. She wore “a Calico Gown and Bed-gown” and “a striped Linsey

Bedgown and three Petticoats.” Her owner noted that the resourceful Phebe “sometimes called herself Sarah, and pretends to be free.”

What is more remarkable about this notice is what followed: a newfound sense of alarm. The claimants of escaped slaves, as well as newspaper editors, were growing worried that a far-reaching network of Pennsylvania’s free African Americans lent a helping hand to the colony’s runaway slaves. The advertisement for Phebe, for instance, closed with “It is supposed that she is harboured by some of the free Negroes in or near Philadelphia or Germantown.”⁹

Other advertisements document that husbands and wives frequently escaped together. One couple, Frank and Anne, coordinated their escape from their owners while living in different locations, only to then rendezvous at a previously determined site. Anne, who had escaped from Robert Wakely of Philadelphia, was “18 or 20 years of age, had on a blue Jacket and Petticoat, Ozenbrigs Apron, and an old Cap.” The notice continued that, “At the same Time,” a “Negroe Man named Frank, belonging to Alexander Collay of Whitemarsh, about 30 or 35 Years of Age,” also ran away. “They are Man and Wife, and supposed to be gone together.”

There are also cases in which a husband and wife ran off together with their children, such as when “a Negroe man and woman” together with their “young female child” escaped from their owner in Leacock Township, Lancaster County. The family was accompanied by a white servant man named Adam Jacobs. Most revealing is monetary worth of a human life based on race: “Whoever secures them . . . shall receive Forty Shillings for the white man, Thirty for the Negro man, and the same for the woman and child.”

One case highlighted just how complex African American-Native American relations were in Pennsylvania during the century. A father and son fled together, possibly with the goal of running away to an Indian settlement. The advertisement stated that a “very big Negroe man, named Sampson, about 50 years of age,” who “has some Indian blood in him,” ran way with his son, Sam, “a boy about 12 or 14 years of age,” who “was born of an Indian woman, and looks much like an Indian.” The claimant, Silas Parvin of Philadelphia, was especially concerned because “they ha[d] taken with them a gun and ammunition, and two rugs.” He was also troubled because “both can talk Indian very well, and it is likely they have dressed themselves in Indian dress.”¹⁰

The fear of groups of slaves escaping together with weapons—as reported in the case of Sampson and son—regularly surfaced in the pages of the *Pennsylvania Gazette* during the century, and sheds insight into the mindset of runaway slaves who obviously believed that weapons gave them a better chance to survive either attempts at recapture or the harsh Pennsylvania wilderness. This phenomenon is evidenced by advertisements appearing in the

Gazette between September 28, 1733, and October 11, 1733. Several slave owners described a remarkable scenario that had recently played out within the southeastern section of the colony.

Run away from Justice Farmer's of Whitemarsh a Negroe Man named Gloster, from John Petty, Indian Trader, a Negroe Man and Woman, from John Baily of Philadelphia Shoemaker, a Negroe Man named Corke from the Widow Bird of Philadelphia, a Negroe Man, and from John Noble of Philadelphia, a Negroe Man called Bristor. They all went away last Saturday, and took Guns with them, and have been seen going up Perkiomy Road last Monday Night.

The announcements ended with a warning to the public: that these individuals must be apprehended “at once” for it was feared that their “intent [was] to do some Mischief.” The colonists’ anxiety about the possibility of armed slave uprisings can be better understood by examining the context surrounding the challenges leveled against the system of New World slavery during the 18th century, a process that would gather even more steam at the era’s close following Toussaint L’ Overture’s successful Haitian revolution of 1791–1804.¹¹



Nicholas Biddle, a Civil War veteran, n.d. Photo from Temple University, Blockson Archives. Used with permission.

One incident that had stoked the colonists’ fears occurred close to Pennsylvania, the 1712 New York City slave uprising. In April of that year, at least twenty-three slaves secretly met at a tavern, planned an attack, and then armed themselves with guns and hatchets. They, along with others who would spontaneously join them, set fire to a building near Broadway, in the heart of the city, and began shooting and fighting the responders to the fire. Eventually, twenty-seven slaves were caught and executed, several of them burned to death by authorities. Six of the captured slaves committed suicide before their death sentence was carried out, perhaps as one final act of resistance.

One of the results of this incident was that colonial laws in both New York and Pennsylvania took an even more decisive turn in the treatment of slaves, including punishing

individuals who had aided or abetted them in their escape. Pennsylvania used the New York event as a reason to levy additional taxes on the import of slaves, making it costlier—but certainly not a deterrent—for those involved in profiting from the slave trade.¹²

Among northern slave revolts however, there are several cases that have not attracted the scrutiny of the New York City episode, yet they occurred in Pennsylvania and are no less significant. The first of these occurred in 1734, in Burlington, Bradford County, a small farming community in the Commonwealth's Northern Tier. The plan hatched by Burlington's slave community was extensive; meetings had taken place over a period of several weeks. The organizers planned to hide in the woods at night and then attack the farmhouses and businesses in the area, setting fires and killing slave owners. Their plan also highlighted the possibility of an extensive Native American-African American network, as they intended to make their getaway "towards the Indians in the French interest." The plot, however, was thwarted.

According to scholar Joseph Carroll, "thirty [slaves] were apprehended, two were hanged, others had their ears cut off, while still others of the number were flogged." While the revolt failed, one did succeed in destroying both a great deal of property, as well as striking a blow against slavery in Pennsylvania. In so doing, it prompted drastic legislative consequences for both slave and free black communities in the region.¹³

This incident took place more than seventy years after the Burlington conspiracy, and transpired in York, York County, in 1803. Although the unfolding of the events is rather sketchy, it is known that it began after a female slave, Margaret Bradley, had attempted to poison her master and mistress. She was convicted and incarcerated in a local jail. Her arrest triggered a series of events over a period of several weeks during which both slaves and some free African American community members in and around York set fires, intending to destroy the entire community. York County was among the most active in the Commonwealth in its percentage of slaves held relative to its total population. In York County, the majority of slaves worked in agriculture.

After eleven buildings were destroyed, the predicament had escalated to such a degree that Governor Thomas McKean (1734–1817) called in the militia to quell the riots and fires, which at the time had included an unsuccessful attempt at breaking Bradley out of jail. Scores of individuals were arrested and jailed.

Laws were also enacted to curtail the mobility of both slave and free African Americans in the area. On March 21, the justices of the peace posted notices throughout the community declaring that "the inhabitants of York and its vicinity to the distance of ten miles" must keep their slaves "at home under strict discipline and watch." Free African Americans in the district were notified that they must purchase passes from the local justice of the peace for travel so that they "might not be restrained from their daily labor." Bradley was eventually sent to Philadelphia's Walnut

Street Prison, the first state penitentiary in the United States (known at the time as the Jail and Penitentiary House at Walnut Street in Philadelphia), where she lived among, as scholar Leslie Patrick Stamp has demonstrated, a prison population that was both disproportionately African American and female.¹⁴

Slave resistance in Pennsylvania frequently included acts of sabotage and work interruption or stoppage. “Even when on the job and under the master’s direct supervision, many slaves did not work to their best ability,” Merle Gerard Brouwer observed. “The slowdown on the job was a means of slave resistance and made the resultant labor more expensive. . . . Slaves had no commitment to be productive, and they often sabotaged their work or stole from the master.”

Isaac Norris (1671–1735), a member of the Society of Friends and a prolific slave owner and slave trader, received many complaints from individuals who had purchased his slaves. Norris recounted that an owner told him that one of the slaves that he had purchased “pretended he could not work” and would continually tell his overseer that “his hand was broke and he was good for nothing.” Purchasers informed the trader of similar episodes. One owner told Norris that his slave named Harry was “excessively rebellious” and would not perform tasks. A customer complained that a slave he had purchased, a “Negro Woman named Jenny,” had stopped working entirely and announced that she “will not do anything” for him at all. Even one of Norris’ own slaves had apparently given him much aggravation, as he had commented on several occasions in letters written to friends that the “woman had played some ILL pranks in [my] family” for several years.¹⁵

Following the enactment of Pennsylvania’s gradual emancipation act in 1780—the first of its kind in the colonies—the slave population in the Commonwealth steadily decreased with every decade to approximately 64 in 1840, the final year that the Census had designated a column in which to record slaves. (An exception occurred between 1820 and 1830 when the slave population doubled from 211 to 403.).

The reason that slaves existed in Pennsylvania after 1780 was because the legislation was worded to promote gradual abolition; the act explicitly ended slavery only if the slave was manumitted by his or her owner or had died of natural causes. Passed on March 1, 1780, the Act stated that

from and after the Passing of this Act, shall not be deemed and considered as Servants for Life or Slaves; and that all Servitude for Life or Slavery of Children in Consequence of the Slavery of their Mothers, in the Case of all Children born within this State from and after the passing of this Act as aforesaid, shall be, an

hereby is, utterly taken away, extinguished and for ever abolished.¹⁶

The Act further provided

That no Covenant of personal Servitude or Apprenticeship whatsoever shall be valid or binding on a Negroe or Mulatto for a longer Time than Seven Years; unless such Servant or Apprentice were at the Commencement of such Servitude or Apprenticeship under the Age of Twenty one Years; in which Case such Negroe or Mulatto may be holden as a Servant or Apprentice respectively, according to the Covenant, as the Case shall be, until he or she shall attain the Age of twenty eight Years but no longer.¹⁷

However, the act did not free existing slaves, only their children born after March 1, 1780. Because of this, Gary B. Nash and Jean Soderlund contended the act was “in fact the most restrictive of the five gradual abolition laws enacted by northern states from 1780 to 1804.” Moreover, while the act provided for trial by jury of “Negroes and Mulattos as well as Slaves and Servants and Freeman,” it also explicitly stated that “a Slave shall not be admitted to bear Witness against [sic] a Freeman.”¹⁸

Nevertheless, manumissions in Pennsylvania occurred fairly rapidly over the following several decades, most likely not because of a newfound sense of compassion or a change in conceptions of a hierarchy of civilization based on race but, instead, because slaveholders in the Commonwealth finally realized that the venture of chattel slavery was essentially uneconomic in nature. There was also a likelihood that these owners ultimately bowed to their religious institutions’ governing bodies because churches were simply becoming more consistent in their censuring of slave-owning congregants after the passage of the act.¹⁹

A striking contradiction to Pennsylvania’s 1780 emancipation act transpired almost simultaneously with



Mammy Hawkins, the only former slave living in Bloomsburg, and a centenarian by several years, n.d. Photo from Columbia County Historical and Genealogical Society. Used with permission.

its inception. The passage of a federal fugitive slave law in 1793 propelled to the forefront of both state and national consciousness the unequivocal sanctioning of an institution which both devalued a slave's life and essentially relegated him or her to nothing more than a piece of property. One of the earliest attempts to carry out the law was undertaken by George Washington (1732–1799) after a slave escaped from the President's House in Philadelphia to the friendly anti-slavery state of New Hampshire.

Oney Judge (circa 1773–1848) belonged to Martha Dandridge Custis Washington (1731–1802). She was among her most “trustworthy body servants” as well as an “expert at needlework.” Judge fled the Washington household at Mount Vernon in 1796 and was zealously pursued by President Washington for several years, as he attempted to bring about her return from the City of Portsmouth, where she resided.

A series of letters between Washington and Joseph Whipple (1737/1738–1816), the Collector of Customs of Portsmouth, detailed how the two men had tried to negotiate a return of the Washington's “property.” Washington was not happy with the apparent “terms” for recapture and return that Judge had offered to the customs collector. She informed Whipple that she would only return to the Washingtons under the condition that she was to be freed upon the deaths of the president and his wife. Washington responded, advising Whipple, “To enter into such a compromise with her, as she suggested to you, is totally inadmissible.” When later recounting her ordeal on May 22, 1845, in an interview she granted to the *Granite Freeman*, published in Concord, New Hampshire, she contradicted the agreement that Washington and Whipple had allegedly negotiated. Judge claimed she told Whipple that she would never return to the president and his family because “I am free now and choose to remain so.”

She also maintained that she was haunted by fear for the remainder of her life, worrying that she one day would be abducted and returned to Washington, an anxiety that only subsided once she learned that both the president and his wife had died. Judge concluded her interview by declaring that she would have never escaped Philadelphia without the aid of the city's African Americans. Her plan succeeded because her “friends among the colored people of Philadelphia” would have her “things carried [to their homes] beforehand,” so that she could unobtrusively slip out of “Washington's house while they were eating dinner.”²⁰

After grasping the significance of this case, historians grappled with several pertinent questions. Who were the individuals who helped those like Oney Judge escape from slavery in Pennsylvania? What kinds of networks existed throughout the Commonwealth to assist fugitive slaves from other states after they arrived in Pennsylvania?

While much is known about the Underground Railroad in the United States and Pennsylvania, most of this information comes from the perspective of the many white-operated abolitionist

groups. These groups offered substantial aid to escaped slaves, and they fervently protested the moral, religious, and ethical dilemmas associated with supporting slavery. They often operated as significant paragons of a positive interracial commitment to the cause of abolition and to legal justice for fugitive slaves as they pushed for federal, state, and local laws to help both.

But looking at the phenomenon from only their perspectives presents a problem in trying to piece together the history of the Underground Railroad. What is essential is a more extensive exploration of the role that African American social, political, and religious leaders undertook to protest slavery and aid the fugitive slave. Benjamin Quarles' groundbreaking 1969 work *Black Abolitionists* illustrates that "the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery admitted only one Negro from 1775 to 1859." He was Robert Purvis (1810–1898).²¹

Throughout Pennsylvania, African Americans were at or at least among the vanguard of the movement to protest slavery and aid fugitive slaves. Only several years after the formation of the Free African Society in 1787 in Philadelphia by Richard Allen (1760–1831) and Absalom Jones (1746–1818), an organization whose initial intent was to serve as a platform for religious independence and as a social service organization to better the lives of African Americans in the city, one of the first formalized protests against slavery came from its members. In 1799, the Free African Society, led by Jones, actively sought signatures from many of the city's leading African American businessmen to present a petition to the federal government asking for the formal end of the slave trade, a gesture they believed would at least be an important first step towards ending the institution in the United States. In the document, entitled "A Petition of Absalom Jones and Others," addressed "To the President of the United States," and dated December 20, 1799, the signers implored that:

while we feel impress'd with grateful sensations for the
Providential favours we ourselves enjoy, We cannot be insensible
of the condition of our afflicted Brethren, suffering under various
circumstances in different parts of these States; but deeply
sympathizing with them, We are incited by a sense of Social duty
and humbly conceive ourselves authorized to address and petition
you in their behalf.

Following this powerful opening statement, they laid out the reason why they believed they had to speak "in their behalf"—a reason they believed violated the preamble of the 1787 U.S. Constitution, which had ensured "justice" and "domestic tranquility" for all. They asserted that, "We apprehend this solemn Compact is violated by a trade carried on in a clandestine manner to the Coast of Guinea, and another equally wicked practiced openly by Citizens of some of the Southern States upon the waters of Maryland and Delaware: Men sufficiently callous as to

qualify for the brutal purpose, are employed in kidnapping those of our Brethren that are free, and purchasing others of such as claim a property in them.”

In closing, Jones and his supporters targeted the recently passed 1793 Fugitive Slave Bill. “The Law not long since enacted by Congress called the Fugitive Bill,” they decried, “is, in its execution found to be attended with circumstances peculiarly hard and distressing,” for now these fugitives, who, “fear being carried off by those Men-stealers, have been forced to seek refuge by flight; they are then hunted by armed Men, and under colour of this law, cruelly treated, shot, or brought back in chains to those who have no just claim upon them.”²²

Another track for addressing the condition of African Americans was the American Colonization Society, founded in 1816, which called for the gradual “repatriation” of African Americans back to Africa, and helped to found the colony of Liberia in 1821. Comprised mostly of Quakers who supported abolition, and Southerners who feared a large population of free blacks, the American Colonization Society also garnered support from African Americans who felt that the United States would never offer a secure home. The most well-known African American supporter of colonization was the Boston seaman and shipping magnate Paul Cuffee (1759–1817), who himself had undertaken an expedition to Sierra Leone in 1811 to negotiate a proposal for a settlement of black Americans. Philadelphia leaders who at first supported the ACS were James Forten, a friend of Cuffee’s, and Absalom Jones of the African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas (who would soon after taking this stance amend his position).

Despite the support of a few significant African American leaders, the idea of colonization was largely condemned by leaders in many northern African American communities, especially Philadelphia’s. In January 1817, Richard Allen and James Forten (1766–1842) led a rally at Mother Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church, during which a resolution was unanimously adopted: “Whereas our ancestors (not of choice) were the first successful cultivators of the wilds of America, we their descendants feel ourselves entitled to participate in the blessings of her luxuriant soil, which their blood and sweat manured; and that any measure or system of measures, having a tendency to banish us from her bosom,



A photo from a family photo album, n.d. From the Chester County Historical Society. Used with permission.

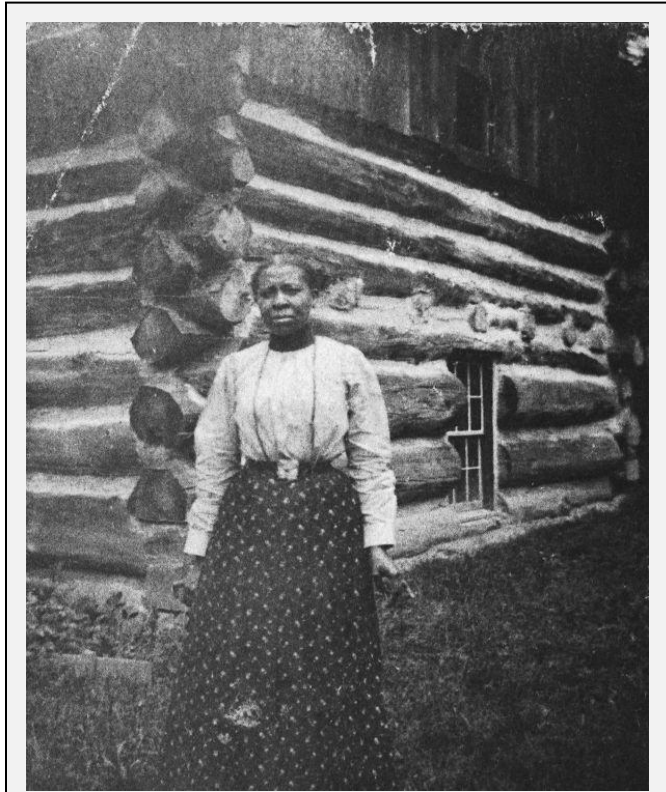
would not only be cruel, but in direct violation of those principles, which have been the boast of this republic.”²³

Philadelphia was also the birthplace for another important remonstrance against the institution, the December 1833 preliminary meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society, held at the Adelphi Building on 214 South Fifth Street. When the American Anti-Slavery Society (AASS) met at Adelphi Hall in Philadelphia in 1833, its ideological foundation, held by its leader William Lloyd Garrison (1805–1879), had not called for repatriation but, instead, for the immediate emancipation of slaves in the United States, a position that eventually created a split in the party among some of its more conservative-gradualist elements. Two prominent African American residents of Philadelphia—Robert Purvis, founder of the Philadelphia Library Company of Colored People, and James McCrummell, minister and dentist—took part in the progressive interracial meeting. The society’s constitution and “Declaration of Sentiments” was written by Garrison with the aid of these individuals, and was, in fact, composed in McCrummell’s home.

Purvis, McCrummell, and Abraham Shadd of nearby Chester County were eventually given seats on the society’s board of managers. Despite the tireless work that AASS performed, it would not be until August 1835 when the Philadelphia Vigilance Association (PVA), also known as the Vigilant Association of Philadelphia, was organized. The association, intended to assist fugitive slaves and African American “persons in distress,” was the first large-scale organization whose leaders were mainly African Americans. At first interracial, PVA selected three of the city’s most prominent African Americans to serve as its executive officers: McCrummell as president; James Needham, a successful barber and director of the St. Thomas’ African Episcopal Church Juvenile Singing School, as treasurer; and Jacob C. White Sr. (1837–1902), barber and founder of the Lebanon Cemetery, the first African American burial ground in Philadelphia, as secretary. Purvis formed an arm of this group, the Vigilant Committee of Philadelphia, to help fugitives by providing housing and food. The organization was prolific in its role on the Underground Railroad, and “assisted some three hundred fugitives a year.”²⁴

By 1839, PVA had become operated primarily by African Americans. Many of the city’s black leaders believed that they were not receiving a fair deal as members of other abolition societies and joined its ranks. Throughout its history, the PVA boasted such members as the famous Underground Railroad operator and author William Still (1819/1821–1902); mathematician and later principal of the Institute for Colored Youth, Charles Reason (1818–1893); and founder of the First African Presbyterian Church, Steven Gloucester. Gloucester was also one of the founders of the second of the two primarily African American-operated abolition societies in Philadelphia, the American Moral Reform Society (AMRS). More national in scope than PVA, AMRS had members in Pennsylvania, New York, and New Jersey. The society held its first meeting in August 1837 at the First African Presbyterian Church on Seventh and Shippen streets

in Philadelphia. White, also a member of the Philadelphia Vigilance Association, was one of the principal members of the AMRS, and helped write a circular published by the group entitled “Address to the Colored Churches in the Free States,” which condemned slavery and implored African American churches and congregants to boycott the slave crops of tobacco, rice, cotton, and sugar.²⁵



Unidentified woman standing beside her log house, c. 1905. From the Chester County Historical Society. Used with permission.

The Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society (PFASS), established in 1833 by Quaker Lucretia Coffin Mott (1793–1880), engaged a number of African Americans as leaders. Grace Bustill Douglass (1782–1842), as well as Sarah Forten (1814–1883) and her sisters Harriet Forten Purvis (1810–1875) and Margaretta Forten (1815–1875), were among the initial signers of the society’s constitution. Sarah Mapp Douglass (1806–1882), a teacher and founder of a school for African Americans and later principal of the Institute of Colored Youth, founded in 1838, was also a signer. At a meeting of the PFASS in Philadelphia in 1837, Grace Douglass was chosen as one of the organization’s vice presidents. She helped write “Appeal of the Women of the Nominally Free States,” which chastised Northern women for inaction over the slavery issue, avowing that “its

demoralizing influence is polluting their domestic circles and blasting the fair character of their sons and brothers.” Sarah Forten, who became one of the society’s chief organizers of the city’s anti-slavery fundraising fairs, added a poetic preamble to the document, imploring women to take up the cause.

We are thy sisters.—God has truly said,
That of one blood the nations He has made
Oh, Christian woman! in a Christian land,
Canst this unblushing lead this great command
Suffer the wrongs which wring our inmost heart,
To draw one throb of pity on thy part!

Our skins may differ but from thee we claim
A sister's privilege and a sisters name.

Forten worked as one of the primary fundraisers to secure a building in which all of Philadelphia's abolitionist groups could meet, Pennsylvania Hall; the building was burned to the ground four days after its opening ceremonies by rabid anti-abolitionist mobs who were gaining traction in the city at the time²⁶

Throughout much of the early 19th century in Pittsburgh, African Americans actively protested slavery and constructed vast networks of aid to assist fugitive slaves. John B. Vashon, the originator of the African Education Society in 1832 and one of the founding members of the interracial Anti-Slavery Society of Pittsburgh in the following year, helped organize the African American-run Pittsburgh Vigilance Committee (PVC). The PVC counted among its initial members a number of the city's noteworthy African American leaders, such as Lewis Woodson (1806–1878), pastor of the first African Methodist church in Pittsburgh, and restaurant owner and entrepreneur John Peck. Vashon's city bath and Peck's oyster house, both on Market Street, and Woodson's church operated as sites on the Underground Railroad. But it was perhaps another member of both the ASSP and PVC whose significant role in both the agitation against slavery and in providing assistance for fugitive slaves would truly resonate on both local and national levels, Martin R. Delany (1812–1885).

Delany was an activist, physician, writer, Black Nationalist, newspaper editor and, later, a Civil War hero. According to William J. Switala, Delany's abolitionist organization, the Philanthropic Society of Pittsburgh, "aided as many as 269 fugitives to escape to freedom in one year alone." Delany's Pittsburgh-based African American newspaper, *The Mystery*, often contained articles about the evils of slavery, reflected by the words that appeared on the banner above the newspaper's name heralding "Hereditary Bondsmen! Know Ye Not Who Would Be Free, Themselves Must Strike The First Blow!" Delany took the line from Lord Byron's 1818 poem entitled "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage."²⁷

Another organizational first, but on a national scale, was the formation in Pittsburgh in 1838 of the Juvenile Anti-Slavery Society (JASS), which many of the sons of the city's African American leaders joined. Founded by David Peck, son of John Peck, who became its president, and George B. Vashon, son of John Vashon, who became its secretary, the society's supporters spoke out against slavery in their churches and in meetings held at their homes. Scholar C. Peter Ripley has documented that these types of young men's societies, which began to crop up in African American communities throughout the northern states after the formation of JASS, were often affiliated with religious institutions and functioned as groups "where boys as young as eleven years old delivered antislavery speeches." In an insightful letter written by Peck and

Vashon and published in the November 23, 1839, edition of the *Colored American*, the enthusiasm of the group's early members is palpable.

“At a meeting of the Juvenile Anti-Slavery Society, held November 11, it was unanimously resolved that five dollars should be given to the support of the *Colored American*, a paper, which, of all others we ought to support. We hope that this small donation may be the means of doing good, and we pray you in the name of the members of the Juvenile Anti-Slavery Society, to accept it as a small token of the esteem we have for your paper. The Juvenile Anti-Slavery Society (of which we have the honor of being members) was formed on the 7th of July, 1838. It is a ‘cent a week’ society, and is the first and only of the kind formed this side of the mountains. The society now consists of about forty members. . . . We conclude, by expressing our hope, that our little mite may be of some service in the cause which you are engaged.”²⁸

Organizations and extensive networks aiding fugitive slaves existed throughout the first half of the 19th century in various regions of the Commonwealth. The Harrisburg Anti-Slavery Society was established in the capital city in 1836. Drawing much of its constituency from the Wesley Union African Methodist Episcopal Church located on the corner of Third and Mulberry streets (found in that location from 1829 to 1839 with the AME church that shared its building), claimed members such as Edward “King” Bennett, proprietor of a successful chimney sweeping business. King became one of the principal agents assisting fugitives in that section of the city, which was, incidentally, the main thoroughfare for African Americans living in Harrisburg at the time. Other prominent Harrisburg residents who helped hide runaway slaves and agitate against slavery were individuals such as George and Marie Chester, whose oyster house restaurant on Third and Market streets, “became a hub for local abolitionist activity” beginning in 1831. Their establishment became known as a prime seller of Garrison’s anti-slavery journal, *The Liberator*.

When the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society, an off-shoot of Garrison’s American Anti-Slavery Society, held its initial meeting in Harrisburg in January 1837, at least seven African American abolitionists from around the Commonwealth attended, including James Forten and Robert Purvis from Philadelphia and Stephen Smith (1795–1873), a resident of East Fallowfield, Chester County. William Whipper (1804–1876), of Columbia, Lancaster County, wanted to attend, but since he could not, he sent a letter of support which was read to the assembly. Whipper and Smith were two of the wealthiest African American businessmen in the Keystone State, making their fortune as partners in a booming lumber and coal business located in Columbia. They ardently supported the Underground Railroad and hid slaves in their specially constructed boxcars used to transport their merchandise. One of the most frequent paths that their “commodities” would take was en route to Philadelphia, where William Still was known to have helped many of these runaways.

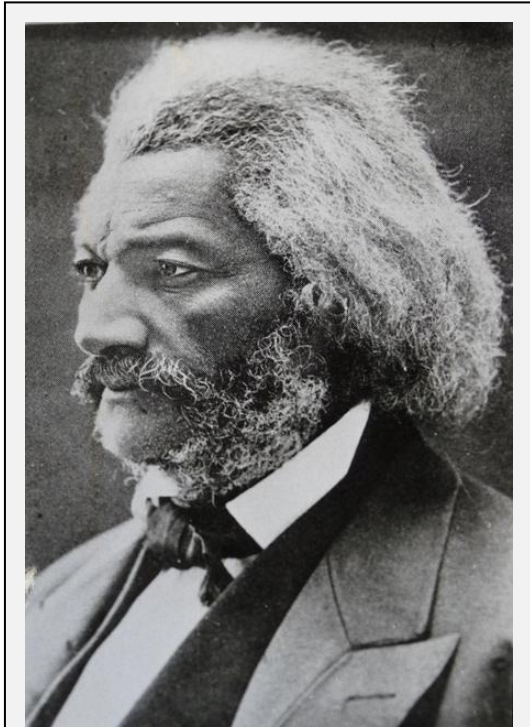
In a telling letter Whipper had written to Still in 1871 when the latter was compiling his famous book on the Underground Railroad, the lumber magnate told the abolitionist that he had helped countless numbers of slaves escape, often “feed[ing] and shelter[ing] from one to seventeen at a time in a single night.” Whipper told Still that he had sent some “west by boats, to Pittsburgh, and others to you in our cars to Philadelphia.” In a three-year period alone, from 1847 to 1850, Whipper claimed he had “passed hundreds to the land of freedom.” He “always persuaded them to go to Canada,” because he had “no faith in their ability to elude the grasp of the slave hunters.”²⁹

Just who were these slave hunters and how did they operate? Very little research has been done on this subject. But there are some generalizations that can be made, and a few examples to give us an idea. The 1793 Federal Fugitive Slave Act made it easier for slave owners to cross state lines and, with the aid of a magistrate, have a hearing in which they could reclaim their “property” if it could be “proven” that a slave was formerly theirs. Legislation passed throughout the 19th century seriously affected how justice, at least in theory, was supposed to be carried out. In a case in which Pennsylvania leapt to the forefront of protecting the rights of fugitive slaves from potential miscarriages of justice, the Commonwealth passed the first of its several “progressive personal liberty laws” during the 1820s. These laws began with legislation enacted in March 1820 that increased the penalty for Southerners who had attempted to kidnap fugitive slaves with “up to twenty-one years in prison of hard labor.” The law also made it more difficult for claimants to successfully retrieve their slaves because it reduced the number of magistrates in Pennsylvania authorized to hear such cases, striking a huge blow against the language of the 1793 Fugitive Slave Law, whose “interference” in matters of the Commonwealth particularly angered Pennsylvania Supreme Court Chief Justice William Tilghman (1756–1827).³⁰

The initial challenges to Pennsylvania’s 1820 law came primarily from Maryland and Virginia. Virginia tried to persuade Pennsylvania to repeal the act, succeeding a bit in 1826, when the Keystone State made a few adjustments in favor of the rights of the slave catcher, although not altering any significant details of the law. However, beginning in 1837, the first of a series of considerable state and federal challenges to Pennsylvania’s 1820 and 1826 personal liberty laws took place, culminating in 1842 with a United States Supreme Court case, *Prigg v. Pennsylvania*, which struck down Pennsylvania’s 1820s laws, finding them to be unconstitutional.

The case began in 1837, after Edward Prigg, a professional slave catcher from Maryland, arrived in York County with a warrant to “arrest certain runaways.” He seized Margaret Morgan and her children, but when the case went before the local magistrate, the justice asserted that Prigg’s argument was weak due to a lack of sufficient evidence. Prigg and his associates, however, refuted the magistrate’s orders, and fled to Maryland with Morgan and her family. After a lengthy appeal by Pennsylvania’s governor on the behalf of the Morgan family, Maryland’s chief executive repudiated his neighboring state’s offer and, instead, issued (along with the state

legislature) a series of proclamations in 1838 claiming that “a citizen of their state was not subject to the laws of another state” and ended further discussion for retrieving Morgan and her children. The case eventually made its way to the United States Supreme Court, and Pennsylvania’s personal liberty laws were struck down. The rights of slave owners and catchers to retrieve their “property,” based on the 1793 Federal Fugitive Slave Act, were restored.³¹



Frederick Douglass (1818-1895) in his later years. Photo from Temple University, Blockson Archives. Used with permission.

Matters were made worse for fugitive slaves with the passage of an even harsher federal fugitive slave law in 1850.³² The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 denied jury trial to escaped slaves, provided an incentive to federal judges and other officials to aid the recapture of fugitives, provided fines and/or imprisonment to anyone who aided a fugitive, and reduced the documentation required of a slave catcher regarding the legal status of a fugitive. The Act provoked great resentment in the North and solidified sectional party lines.

The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 also sparked a small exodus of free blacks to Canada, encouraged by activists such as Mary Ann Shadd, who argued forcefully that African Americans would never be fully integrated into white American society. Mary Ann Shadd was born in Delaware and moved with her parents and twelve siblings to West Chester at the age of 10. Her father made sure she was educated at a Quaker school and she grew up to be a fervent

advocate against slavery and for civil rights. She taught at several Pennsylvania and Delaware schools and started her own school. She also wrote for Frederick Douglass’s *Northern Star* and published a number of articles and pamphlets about black independence and self-respect. She traveled widely and after moving to Canada, in 1854 she started her own newspaper, the *Provincial Freeman* with the aim of urging blacks to move to Canada where they would be safer and have more opportunities to advance.³³

Many individuals and groups throughout Pennsylvania, such as Delany, responded to the passage of the 1850 Federal Fugitive Slave Act, but none provided a more eloquent and powerful plea than him. At a mass protest held at the Allegheny City Market House on September 30, 1850, he delivered a powerful argument to Pittsburgh’s Mayor Hugh Fleming:

Honorable Mayor, whatever ideas of liberty I may have, have been received from reading the lives of your revolutionary fathers. I have therein learned that a man has a right to defend his castle with his life, even unto the taking of life. Sir, my house is my castle; in that castle are none but my wife and children, as free as the angels of heaven, and whose liberty is as sacred as the pillars of God. If any man approaches that house in search of a slave—I care not who he may be, whether constable or sheriff, magistrate or even judge of the Supreme Court—nay, let it be he who sanctioned this act to become a law, surrounded by his cabinet as his body-guard, with the declaration of Independence waving above his head as his banner, and the constitution of his country upon his breast shield,—if he crosses the threshold of my door, and I do not lay him a lifeless corpse at my feet, I hope the grave may refuse my body a resting-place, and righteous Heaven my spirit a home. O, no! he cannot enter that house and we both live.³⁴

Unfortunately, the effects of both the 1842 and 1850 rulings were more than significant in regards to the story of the fugitive slave in Pennsylvania. Delany was correct to assume that episodes such as these only increased the incidents of slave hunting in the Commonwealth. As Delany had accurately predicted, these confrontations did not occur without a response, as both individuals and groups of African Americans from disparate communities all across Pennsylvania fought valiantly and unrelentingly to fend off marauding groups of slave catchers and protect fugitive slaves from harm.

The incidents occurred in all locales and in all settings, whether rural or urban, in populated areas or in sparsely inhabited villages. One such event was recorded in the *Village Record* of Chester County in the spring of 1851, and occurred near the Gum Tree Tavern in West Fallowfield Township. The newspaper mentioned that at least eight slave catchers, accompanied by a federal marshal, arrived at the small house of Nathan Green, “a colored man” and tenant farmer on the property of a local Quaker farmer, Nathan Walton. Green’s wife, (probably May A. Green, according to the 1850 Census that records the Green residence adjacent to Walton’s property) let the men in, perhaps unknowingly, and asked what they had wanted. They replied they were “in search of a slave,” and without warning, made a sudden “rush for the stairway.” Much to their chagrin, however, Mary’s husband Nathan blocked their path and “armed with an axe dealt blows right and left.” The article mentioned that Mary joined the fray “by attacking the enemy ‘in the rear’ like a skillful general.” Green called for additional help, and answering his call another individual—identified by the newspaper as “a brother African”—stormed down the stairs armed with a musket. Green kept up his fight with his axe, as he believed that he was “protecting his own property.” Meanwhile, Walton, the farmer who owned the property, rushed

to the scene but saw that the slave hunters had “beat a retreat.” The slave hunters told Walton that they were leaving to “prevent further effusion of blood,” but Green stated that this was untrue for they had been “routed, horse, foot and dragons.” The posse apparently made its way to Coatesville, and then to points south. Green and his wife and friend were not injured, as the former “escaped with only a few hard knocks on the head which made no impression!”³⁵

Incidents such as the Green family’s successful repelling of slave hunters appeared in Pennsylvania’s many newspapers following the legislation of 1842 and 1850. However, there are at least two known cases in which entire African American communities came to the aid of individuals in order to prevent their recapture. Both of these episodes signify the determination of African Americans in taking a lead role on the front lines of the Underground Railroad. In both cases, the Pennsylvania courts eventually came down on their side, despite the fact that in these incidents several slave-hunters were injured or killed.

The first of these episodes occurred in Carlisle, Cumberland County, on June 2, 1847, when two Maryland slave hunters “reclaimed” their property, a former slave named Hester who was married to George Norman, a free Carlisle resident. They took her to the courthouse in Carlisle with two other “slaves” to stand before a habeas corpus hearing. Members of Carlisle’s African American community attempted to free her, but they were held at bay by armed guards.

A second attempt to free Hester was made in the courthouse during the hearing, when individuals charged the prisoners’ box, but were rebuffed by armed deputies. After the hearing, which decided the claimants had a right to take their “property,” a revolt erupted. African American residents hurled bricks and bottles at both the law enforcement officers and the slave hunters, injuring Hester’s owner, James Kennedy. One week later, Kennedy died from his wounds. John McClintock (1814–1870) a Dickinson College professor, tried to help by providing legal aid to the fugitives. He was charged with inciting a riot, and several dozen African American residents were charged with felonies. Several months later, at the sentencing on August 25, 1847, McClintock and thirteen African Americans were acquitted, but ten individuals were fined and ordered to serve lengthy sentences at Philadelphia’s Eastern State Penitentiary. The Pennsylvania Supreme Court overturned the sentences based upon McClintock’s appeal, and the residents claimed the episode was a resounding success.³⁶



Cabinet card of Andrew Block (adult) and Henry Rich (child), 1885.
Photo from LancasterHistory.org. Used with permission.

There was a case in Pennsylvania that scholars identify as the quintessential example of a successful large-scale revolt against the forces of the “reverse underground railroad” that became more endemic with each passing year after the passage of the Federal Fugitive Slave Law in 1850. On September 13, 1851, Edward Gorsuch, of Maryland, arrived in Christiana, Lancaster County, looking for his “property.” He and his posse of six men, armed with a warrant issued by the federal magistrate in Philadelphia, went to the home of William Parker, specifically looking for four slaves who had been residing there. Parker, an escaped slave and a known agent on the Underground Railroad, was not going to give in quietly. His wife, Eliza Ann, blew a large horn alerting many in Christiana that an incident was unfolding at their home. Some seventy-five to one hundred African Americans rushed to the Parker residence armed with guns and “farm

implements” to assist the couple. Gunfire erupted and a fight ensued, ultimately leaving Gorsuch dead and his son wounded.

After the rest of the posse were chased out of town, forty-five United States Marines were called in, along with scores of the community’s white residents, to “restore order.” In reality, however, they conducted a campaign of fear and intimidation in which they frightened and attacked many among Christiana’s African American population. Parker (and eventually his wife) escaped to Toronto, Canada, but thirty-eight others were arrested and charged with a felony for failure to carry out a federal order. After several trials brought back verdicts of “Not Guilty” the charges were dropped. William Parker proclaimed the incident as a victory for civil rights in an article

entitled “The Freedman’s Story” that appeared in 1866 in the *Atlantic Monthly*. In the story of his life, he uttered a profound line that still resonates today: “my rights as a freedman . . . were secured by my own right arm.”³⁷

Notes

- ² Edward Raymond Turner. *The Negro in Pennsylvania: Slavery, Servitude, Freedom, 1639-1861*. Whitefish: MT. Kessinger Publishers, 2007 (Reprint of 1911 edition, published by the American Historical Association), 1-3; C.T. Odhner, “The Founding of New Sweden,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 3, 1879, 269-284; Richard R. Wright, *The Negro in Pennsylvania: A Study in Economic History*, 5-9; Samuel Hazard, *Annals of Pennsylvania From the Discovery of the Delaware*, Philadelphia: Hazard and Mitchell, 1850, pp. 49, 331; Gary B. Nash, *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia’s Black Community, 1720-1840*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988, 8-9; Nash, “Slaves and Slaveowners in Colonial Pennsylvania,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 30, no. 2, 1973 223-256; Darold D. Wax, *The Negro Slave Trade in Colonial Pennsylvania*, Dissertation, University of Washington, 1962; George F. Nagel, “Slavery in Pennsylvania,” written for the Afro-Lumens Project, <http://www.afrolumens.org/slavery/buying.html>; A. Leon Higginbotham, *In the Matter of Color: Race and the American Legal Process, The Colonial Period*, New York: Oxford University Press, 267-310.
- ³ Higginbotham, 267.
- ⁴ George Keith in Rufus M. Jones’ *The Quakers in the American Colonies*, Philadelphia: Society of Friends, 1911—reprinted in 2007 for Kessinger Publishing, pp. 511; Nash, 10; Edward Raymond Turner, “The First Abolition Society in the United States,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 36, no. 1 (1912), 92-109; *Let this Voice Be Heard: Anthony Benezet, Father of Atlantic Abolitionism*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009, x. Wright, *The Negro in Pennsylvania*, 13-15; Roger A. Bruns, “Anthony Benezet and the Natural Rights of the Negro,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 96 (January 1972): 104-113.
- ⁵ Turner, *The Negro In Pennsylvania*, 4-9; Wright, *The Negro in Pennsylvania*, 16-24; Higginbotham, *In the Matter of Color*, 280-310; Nash, *Forging Freedom*, 16-37. Emma Lapansky, “Black Presence in Pennsylvania: ‘Making it Home,’” in *Pennsylvania History Studies* No. 21, The Pennsylvania Historical Association, 1990, 4-6; Charles Blockson, *African-Americans in Pennsylvania: A History and Guide*, Black Classic Press, 1994, 10; Thomas E. Drake, *Quakers and Slavery in America*, Gloucester, Mass: Peter Smith, 1965.
- ⁶ Gary B. Nash and Jean R. Soderlund, *Freedom By Degrees: Emancipation in Pennsylvania and its Aftermath*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1991, 5.
- ⁷ *Pennsylvania Gazette*, October 1, 1765; Nagel, AfroLumens, “Public Sales at the London Coffee House,” <http://www.afrolumens.org/slavery/buying.html>.
- ⁸ *Pennsylvania Gazette*, July 18, 1765; March 15, 1764; December 11, 1760; May 09, 1765.
- ⁹ *Pennsylvania Gazette*, September 4, 1746; July 5, 1759; September 1, 1763.
- ¹⁰ *Pennsylvania Gazette*, October 24, 1758; September 27, 1770; October 1, 1747.
- ¹¹ *Pennsylvania Gazette*, September 28, 1733--October 11, 1733; Merle Gerald Brouwer. *The Negro as a Slave and as a Free Black in Colonial Pennsylvania*. Detroit: Wayne State University, 1973 (Doctoral Dissertation), 327.

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- ¹² Herbert Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1943—50th Anniversary edition, International Publishers, 1993, 172-173; Harvey Wish, “American Slave Insurrections Before 1861,” *The Journal of Negro History* Vol. 22, no. 3, 1937.
- ¹³ Joshua Coffin, *An Account of Some of the Principal Slave Insurrections*, New York, American Anti-Slavery Society, 1860; Joseph Carroll, *Slave Insurrections in the United States, 1800-1865*, Boston: Chapman and Grimes, 1938; reprinted in 2004 by Dover Press, NY.
- ¹⁴ Junius Rodriguez, *Encyclopedia of Slave Resistance and Rebellion*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2007, 76; Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts*, 239-241; *York Daily Record*, February-March, 1803; *There is a River: The Black Struggle for Freedom in America*. New York: Mariner, 1993; Leslie Patrick Stamp, “Numbers That Are Not New: African-Americans in the Country’s First Prison, 1790-1835” in *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 119 no. ½, 95-128.
- ¹⁵ Merle Gerald Brouwer. *The Negro as a Slave and as a Free Black*, 329; Darold D. Wax, “Negro Resistance to the Early American Slave Trade,” *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 51, no. 1, 12-13.
- ¹⁶ An Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery. Printable version accessed July 12, 2010.
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- ¹⁷ Ibid.
- ¹⁸ Ibid.
- ¹⁹ Higginbotham, *In the Matter of Color*, 268-269; 306-309; Turner, *The Negro in Pennsylvania*, 253; Nash and Soderlund, *Freedom By Degrees*, 111, 137-166.
- ²⁰ Edward Lawler Jr., “The President’s House in Philadelphia: The Rediscovery of a Lost Landmark,” *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 126, no.1, 5-95, and “Oney Judge,” <http://www.ushistory.org/presidentshouse/slaves/oney.htm>; both a significant newspaper article and interview with Judge are also cited by Lawler—those being Judge’s interview in *The Granite Freeman*, Concord, New Hampshire (May 22, 1845) which was taken from *Frank W. Miller's Portsmouth New Hampshire Weekly*, June 2, 1877, under the title “Washington's Runaway Slave, and How Portsmouth Freed Her.” By T.H. Adams, and also the Rev. Benjamin Chase’s. “Letter to the editor,” in *The Liberator*, January 1, 1847, which was republished in *Slave Testimony, Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Interviews, and Autobiographies*, by John W. Blassingame, ed. (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), pp. 248-50.
- ²¹ Benjamin Quarles, *Black Abolitionists*, New York: De Capo Press, 1969, 12; Nash, *Forging Freedom*, 100-107; William J. Switala, *Underground Railroad in Pennsylvania*, Mechanicsburg, Pa.: Stackpole Books, 2001, 5-26; Charles Blockson, *The Underground Railroad in Pennsylvania*, Flame International, 1981, 3-6; Richard S. Newman, *The Transformation of American Abolitionism: Fighting Slavery in the Early Republic*, Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2002. “See also Richard S. Newman’s “The Pennsylvania Abolition Society: Restoring a Group to Glory,” on the Historical Society of Pennsylvania’s website at <http://www.hsp.org/default.aspx?id=815>.
- ²² Petition of Absalom Jones and others, December 30, 1799—4, HR6A-F4.2. Jan. 2, 1800--Records of the U. S. House of Representatives, Record Group 233, National Archives, Washington, DC. Reprinted in Raymond W.

- Smock, *Landmark Documents on the U. S. Congress*, CQ Press, 1999. See also, Quarles, *Black Abolitionists*, 3, 59, 191; Nash, *Forging Freedom*, 100-133.
- ²³ James Forten, "A Voice from Philadelphia" in William Lloyd Garrison's *Thoughts on African Colonization, Or, An Impartial Exhibition of the Doctrines, Principals and Purposes of the American Colonization Society Together with the Resolutions, Addresses, and Remonstrances of the Free People of Color*, Boston: Garrison and Knapp, 1832, Part Two, 9-10.; Julie Winch, *A Gentleman of Color: The Life of James Forten*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003; Ray Allan Billington, "James Forten: Forgotten Abolitionist." In *Negro History Bulletin XIII*. (November 1949): 31-45; See also Louis R. Mehlinger's "The Attitude of the Free Negro Toward African Colonization," *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 1, no. 3, 276-301.
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- ³³ When the Civil War started Shadd returned to the United States and became a recruiter for the union army. At the age of 60 she completed law school and practiced in the District of Columbia. *Pamphlets of Protest: An Anthology of Early African American Protest Literature*. Edited by Richard Newman, Patrick Rael, and Phillip Lapsansky. New York: Routledge, 2001; "Mary Ann Shadd Cary, a Biographical Sketch of a Rebel," by Shamina Sneed online at <http://womenslegalhistory.stanford.edu/papers/CaryMAS-Sneed02.pdf>.
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Chapter 2

African-American Religious Organizations and Institutions in Pennsylvania 1644-1965

The history of African American religious institutions in Pennsylvania weaves through every other aspect of black experience, from the very first days that individuals of African descent set foot in the New World, usually as slaves or indentured servants. The question of whether slaves would even have an organized religion was not a subject that many Pennsylvania slave owners worried themselves about until the mid-18th century; mostly they just ignored the spiritual activities of their slaves. While there is little documentation concerning the acceptance and organization of earlier belief systems among Africans in Pennsylvania, there is extensive evidence regarding the impact that Christianity had among African American communities in the Commonwealth.³⁸ In establishing independent Christian churches, black Pennsylvanians created their first and most enduring truly autonomous institutions.

Independent churches evolved in their role in African American culture. Initially, from emphasizing such points as the universal belief in a “just, impartial God,” to exhortation “based on biblical examples of themes of victory over seemingly insurmountable odds and individuals who act as they anticipate deliverance,” black churches served as epicenter to unify and mobilize African Americans toward social change. Such human properties cultivated in the church provided “continued commitment, provide[d] a common, reassuring language, and frame[d] pending events,” acting as inspiration to “organize, shape, and motivate slave escapes ... sit-ins, voting drives, freedom rides, economic aid and also mitigate fear of lynching, beatings, job termination, and death.”³⁹

The black church served various purposes. It was a foundation for institutions and organizations that emerged subsequently in cities. In larger population centers, particularly Pittsburgh and Philadelphia, additional institutions arose to address needs specific to black urban communities. Churches remained central to African Americans’ survival in the small, isolated, and rural communities throughout the Commonwealth. In addition to spiritual guidance, the church provided opportunities for formal education. In the 18th and 19th centuries, churches often served as classroom and later contributed to the development of black colleges. Access to formal education provided one vehicle from which to launch a seemingly endless struggle for social justice.

Records and narratives regarding black Christian churches in Pennsylvania provide a clear and explicit example of the power and influence of black churches in procuring equality. Though not the sole advocate for change, the churches were critical; black Christian churches together were an institution that provided true freedom for black Pennsylvanians to engage in both the spiritual and secular pursuit of emancipation. As scholar Theodore Hershberg concluded, there are “two basic reasons the all-black church has long been recognized as the key institution in the Negro community: first an oppressed and downtrodden people used religion for spiritual sustenance and for its promise of a better life in the next world; second, with the ability to participate in the political, social, and economic spheres of the larger white society in which they lived sharply curtailed, Negroes turned to the church for fulfillment of their secular needs.”⁴⁰

Black churches’ early contributions to the later civil rights movements was immense; churches filled a “vacuum” by expanding “their jurisdiction to include political and social, as well as religious, concerns.”⁴¹ Black churches became and remained “the arena for developing leadership skills”.⁴² The development and advances that African Americans made in the church led directly to progress in procuring civil rights, because the church “served as both the training ground and the operating base for religious leaders . . . who in turn were seen by many whites and blacks as the black community’s secular leaders as well.”⁴³

African conversion in the 18th century

Although they did not enjoy an abundance of options to adopt or practice their European master’s various Christian denominations (nor perhaps the desire to as well), they did bring with them a variety of African religious beliefs and traditions. “Before 1750 European Americans made only cursory attempts at converting their slaves to Christianity,” wrote Richard Middleton in *Colonial America*,

fearing among other things, that conversion might lead to a demand for emancipation . . . for most of the colonial period, therefore, the slaves were left to their own devices especially on the large rice plantations of the colonial south where contact with the white population was minimal. Some Africans from Senegambia and the Gold Coast were clearly practicing Muslims, judging from the advertisements for runaway slaves with Islamic names. . . . Most Africans believed in a Supreme Creator under whom there were various lesser gods usually associated with natural phenomena like thunder, lightning, rain, earth, fertility, spring, summer and fall. All had the power to do good or ill, and it was important to propitiate them by invoking various forms of Obeah or magic through the use of various charms and talismans called minkisi.⁴⁴

It should be noted that although Penn promised freedom of religious worship, this practice did not extend to African people, as evidenced in the fact of their conversion and the absence of legitimacy given to the religious beliefs that they held prior to arriving in the colony.

Proselytizing slaves was controversial. Some whites were simply apathetic. But there were sharply opposing opinions concerning the effect conversion would have on the institution of slavery. On one side, many whites feared that, as Richard Middleton noted, “among other things that conversion might lead to a demand for emancipation.”⁴⁵ Scholar C. E. Pierre found statements in the records of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts that illustrate many whites’ attitude toward proselytizing among Pennsylvania’s African slave population. He noted that a “Rev. Mr. Pugh, a missionary at Appoquinimmick, Pennsylvania,” wrote a letter to the Society in 1737, in which he declared “he had received a few blacks and that the masters of the Negroes were prejudiced against their being Christians.”⁴⁶

Further, many groups were divided over what extent black converts should be accepted into the established Christian community if they did convert. The treatment of slaves and freedmen by Pennsylvania’s Quakers, who were divided over the issue of slave-owning until the late 18th century, illustrates this question of acceptance into membership of the Meeting. Henry Cadbury, in his 1936 article entitled “Negro Membership in the Society of Friends,” wrote that the endorsement of worship by African American Quakers was not sanctioned until at least 1756. In that year, the Philadelphia Meeting accepted a proposal allowing African American Quakers to hold segregated meetings at the “Bank Meeting House at 3 O’clock P.M.” on “the Fourth day following each Quarterly Meeting.” By 1800, Cadbury noted that African American Quakers “met in the Pine street and Market Street meetinghouses, and they would do so typically on the Third day afternoon.”⁴⁷

Nonetheless, while it is difficult to discover in the historical record the existence of African or African-inspired religious traditions in Pennsylvania before 1750, scholars C. E. Pierre and Carter G. Woodson have noted that numerous incidents of religious conversion and baptism of individuals of African descent occurred in the Commonwealth during the early part of the 18th century.

The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, established by the Anglican church in London in 1701, was one group that dispatched missionaries to the New World to convert slaves and freedmen. So did other religious denominations, such as the Methodists, Presbyterians, Lutherans, and Quakers, all of whom had factions within their religious organizations that were sympathetic (and often paternalistic) to the cultural, religious, and social needs of both slaves and the freedmen. Pierre and Woodson contend that as early as 1712, the Society sent missionaries to Pennsylvania and baptized a number of individuals of African

descent, both enslaved and free. During that year, G. Ross baptized “12 adult Negroes” in the Anglican Church in Philadelphia. The Reverend Ross remarked that “when examined before the congregation” these individuals had “answered to the admiration of all who heard them.”⁴⁸

When Pierre scrutinized the Society’s records, he discovered

Rev. Mr. Beckett, minister in Sussex County, Pennsylvania, said in 1723 that he had admitted two Negro slaves and that many Negroes constantly attended his services. The same year Rev. Mr. Bartow baptized a Negro at West Chester. . . . Rev. Richard Locke christened eight Negroes in one family at Lancaster in 1747 and another Negro there the following year. In 1774 the Rev. Mr. Jenney reported that there was ‘a great and daily increase of Negroes in this city who would with joy attend upon a catechist for instruction’; that he had baptized several, but was unable to add to his other duties; and the Society, ever ready to lend a helping hand to such pious undertakings, appointed the Rev. W. Sturgeon as catechist for the Negroes at Philadelphia.⁴⁹

Evidence of early conversion to Christianity among Pennsylvania’s slave population is revealed in a survey of the ubiquitous run-away slave advertisements which appeared in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* during the 18th century. A number of the notices contain telling references to the practice, knowledge, or preaching of religious ideas. For instance, an advertisement appearing in August 1745 sought the return of a fugitive known as “Preaching Dick.”

RUN away from the Subscriber, a Negroe Man, named Dick, known by the Name of Preaching Dick: He had on a brown Waistcoat, lined with green, Ozenbrigs Shirt and Trowsers, Shoes and Stockings, Whoever takes him up, and brings him to Joseph Scull, Under Sheriff, shall have Twenty Shillings Reward , and reasonable Charges, paid by Robert Grace. . . . It is supposed he is lurking about Town.⁵⁰

Three years later, on June 23, 1748, a “Spanish Negroe fellow named John” had “run away from John Potts of Colebrookdale,” and the public was warned to be wary of him because he was “subject to make game at the ceremonial part of all religious worship, except that of the Papists.” Similar to this story is an account of a female fugitive slave who was apparently known to have outwardly practiced her religious beliefs, illustrating that the religious sphere was in no way dominated by males. Elizabeth Gregory, who ran away from John Kearsley of Philadelphia, an assemblyman, physician, and Anglican vestryman at Christ’s Church on Second and Market

Streets. Gregory was described as “a good laundress” who “handles her needle well,” and that “she pretends to be very religious.”⁵¹

A 1775 report of another woman fleeing the institution of slavery gives insight into her literacy and religious beliefs. On August 23, 1775, a notice stated that, “RUN away, last Saturday,” from Mary Deklyn’s residence on “Callowhill street, the corner of Water street” was “a NEGROE Woman, named Rachel, about 30 years of age.” While the advertisement noted Rachel “had on, and took with her, a black bonnet, furniture check petticoat, striped short gown, check apron, a coloured handkerchief, a new Irish linen shirt not quite made,” and a “green silk umbrella almost new,” it was also mentioned that she took with her “a hymn book with the subscribers name in it.”⁵²

Two advertisements appearing in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* during the latter half of the 18th century yield specific accounts of religious practice and preaching on the part of slaves of African descent. On November 25, 1772, Moses Grimes, an African American who ran away from John Hales of Lombard Street in Philadelphia, was described as “very religious, preaches to his colour, walks before burials, and marries.” On June 6, 1778, the newspaper published a piece detailing the escape of a slave from James Young, “living near Chambersburg, Cumberland County.” When Young made a plea for the return of his slave, a “Mulatto fellow named John Hill,” he described him as “a Methodist Preacher” who had “formerly lived in Charlestown, Maryland.”⁵³

Emergence of Independent Black Churches

An in-depth look at the emergence of the independent black church movement in Pennsylvania—from the late 18th through the early 19th century—reveals that black religious life was thriving even before its formal emergence. Two individuals in particular helped take the disparate experiences of early black preachers and congregants to another level of religious organization and blaze the way for the first self-governing African American church not only in Pennsylvania, but in the nation as well: Richard Allen and Absalom Jones.

Richard Allen’s experiences paralleled those of the fugitive slave John Hill; both of these Methodist preachers had been instructed in the gospel in bordering slave states. Allen, born in 1760, was first owned by jurist Benjamin Chew of Philadelphia but soon afterward was sold to the Stokely family of Dover, Delaware. At the age of seventeen, following his religious conversion, Allen joined “the Methodist Society” and met “in class at Benjamin Wells’s, in the forest, Delaware State.” Allen contended Stokely allowed him to attend these religious meetings because the plantation owner believed that “religion made slaves better and not worse.” After asking his master if John Gray, Wells’s son-in-law, could preach to him at his home, the elder Stokely was so moved by the sermon that he agreed to allow Allen and his brother to purchase

their freedom. Allen left the Stokely plantation and became an itinerant preacher, first sermonizing in Wilmington, Delaware, and then throughout the state of New Jersey.⁵⁴



Richard Allen (1760-1831), one of the founders of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, n.d. Photo from Temple University, Blockson Archives. Used with permission

Arriving in Pennsylvania in 1784, Allen first stopped in Radnor Township, in northwestern Delaware County, and stayed at the home of Caesar Waters and his wife, a free African American couple who owned land. While he “stayed and labored” in Radnor for “several weeks,” he was invited to preach by the Waters family at their home “on Sabbath day,” and many in the surrounding community came to hear him. Many of the individuals Allen described as “of different persuasions” were white, adding “there were but few colored people in the neighborhood.” From Radnor Township, Allen traveled to Lancaster and then to “Little York,” was “put up at George Tess’ a saddler,” and “had comfortable meetings with the Germans.” He left southern Pennsylvania and traveled to Baltimore, Maryland, where the first General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal (M.E.) Church was held in December 1784. He characterized the meeting as “the beginning of the Episcopal church amongst the Methodists.”⁵⁵

Appointed an informal minister by Francis Asbury, one of the first two bishops of the M.E. church in America, Allen initially preached in a “small meetinghouse” in Baltimore known as “Methodist Alley.” In 1785, he joined the Lancaster Circuit of the M.E. Church, and in autumn of that year returned to Radnor Township. In February 1786, Allen made what was perhaps his most fateful decision when he moved to Philadelphia and began preaching in St. George’s United Methodist Church at “5 o clock in the morning.”⁵⁶

At St. George’s, Allen met another preacher and fellow congregant, Absalom Jones, a former slave, and the pair formed the Free African Society (FAS) in 1787. FAS functioned first as a social service institution to provide assistance to the city’s black population, and, secondly, as a religious society. It’s members did not formally align themselves with a particular denomination

nor did they have a church in which to worship. FAS's preamble, written on April 12, 1787, read:

Whereas Absalom Jones and Richard Allen, two men of the African race, who, for their religious life and conversation have obtained a good report among men, these persons, from a love to the people of their complexion whom they beheld with sorrow, because of their irreligious and uncivilized state, often communed together upon this painful and important subject in order to form some kind of religious society, but there being too few to be found under the like concern, and those who were, differed in their religious sentiments; with these circumstances they labored for some time, till it was proposed, after a serious communication of sentiments, that a society should be formed, without regard to religious tenets, provided, the persons lived an orderly and sober life, in order to support one another in sickness, and for the benefit of their widows and fatherless children.⁵⁷

Both men continued to preach irregularly at St. George's Church and "in the commons, in Southwark, Northern Liberties" to a mostly African American audience comprised of slaves and freedmen alike. Allen noted in his autobiography that discrimination began to set in more intensely at St. George's Church during the next several years, a reaction largely caused by the influx of many African Americans who joined the congregation. As this phenomenon neared its breaking point, Allen recalled in his autobiography that, "they moved us from the seats we usually sat on, and placed us around the wall, and on Sabbath morning we went to church and the sexton stood at the door, and told us to go in the gallery."⁵⁸

Allen and Jones led a mass walk-out of African American congregants in November 1787 after dealing with this and other acts of discrimination. On one occasion, congregants kneeling in the church—Jones included—had been forcibly lifted from their places and thrust back into their seats. Allen saw the unfolding hostility as being the final straw that led to him and Jones forming an independent church. He described the walk-out in his autobiography: "But my dear Lord was with us, and we were filled with fresh vigor to get a house erected to worship God in."⁵⁹

Twelve days after the dedication of the African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas, Allen, who several months earlier had purchased a blacksmith shop and had it hauled on to "the lot in Sixth near Lombard street," established and dedicated his church at that location: Mother Bethel Church. After moving the building to the site, "I employed carpenters to repair the old frame, and had it fit for a place of worship," he recounted. On July 29, 1794, Allen formally opened the

church to worshippers. Because Bishop Asbury was “in town” he “solicited him to open the church for us which he accepted.”⁶⁰

Over the next several years, Allen and Jones preached, under the auspices of the Free African Society, in a rented “store room” to former congregants of St. George’s and the city’s African Americans in search of African-centered worship. However, Allen and Jones parted ways because of religious and ideological differences. In 1789, Allen left FAS because he felt its worship sessions were becoming too similar to Quaker meetings that he believed were not in keeping with his Methodist background.⁶¹

The year 1794 was critical for both Allen and Jones as they finally saw their own independent black churches built and dedicated. Herbert Aptheker reiterated that even these initial churches still “remained within the jurisdictional control of higher all-white religious bodies until legal separation—including full control over property—was achieved by the African Methodist Episcopal Church in January of 1816.” Jones’s African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas was ratified by the Episcopal Church and formally established on July 17, 1794, and its building erected on 5th and Adelphi streets. He was ordained a deacon by the Episcopal Church in 1795 and became its first African American priest in 1804. On August 12, 1794, Jones and the other church founders wrote a tract entitled “The Causes and Motives for establishing St. Thomas’ African Church,” in which they asserted:

WHEREAS, a few of our race did in the NAME
and FEAR of GOD, Associate for the purpose Of
advancing our friends in a true knowledge of God, of true
religion, and of the ways and means to restore our long lost
race, to the dignity of men and of Christians;—and

Whereas, God in mercy and wisdom, has exceeded
Our most sanguine wishes, in blessing our undertakings, for
the above purposes, and has opened the hearts of our white
brethren, to assist in our undertakings therein;—and

Whereas the light of the glorious gospel of God, our
Saviour, has begun to shine into our hearts, who were
strangers to the true and living God, and aliens to the
commonwealth of this spiritual Israel; and having seen the
dawn of the gospel day, we are zealously concerned for the
gathering together our race into the sheep-fold of the great
Shepherd and Bishop of our souls; and as we would
earnestly desire to proceed in all our ways therein
consistent with the word of God or the scripture of the
revelation of God's will, concerning us and our salvation;—

and

Whereas, through the various attempts we have made to promote our design, God has marked out made our ways with blessings. And we are now encouraged through the grace and divine assistance of the friends and God opening the hearts of our white friends and brethren, to encourage us to arise out of the dust and shake ourselves, and throw off that servile fear, that the habit of oppression and bondage trained us up in. And in meekness and fear we would desire to walk in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free. That following peace with all men, we may have our fruit unto holiness, and in the end, everlasting life.

And in order the more fully to accomplish the good purposes of God's will, and organize ourselves for the purpose of promoting the health the people all, but more particularly our relatives, of color. We, after many consultations, and some years deliberation thereon, have gone forward to erect a house for the glory of God, and our mutual advantage to meet in for clarification and social religious worship. And more particularly to keep an open door for those of our race, who may be into assemble with us, but would not attend divine worship in Other places.

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Resolve and Decree:

To resign and conform ourselves to the Protest out Episcopal Church of North America. —And we dedicate ourselves to God, imploring his holy protection; and our house to the memory of St. Thomas, the Apostle, to be henceforward known and called by the name and title of St. Thomas's African Episcopal Church of Philadelphia; to be governed by us and our successors for ever as follows.

Given under our hands, this Twelfth day of August,
1794

Founders and Trustees,
WILLIAM GRAY, ABSALOM JONES,
WILLIAM WHITE, WILLIAM GARDNER,
HENRY STEWART, WILLIAM GRAY⁶²

Over the next several years, however, the course of Allen's church took a distinctly different path than that of Jones's church; for while Jones's institution remained affiliated with the Episcopal Church and its more formal hierarchical structure, Allen's Mother Bethel more closely embraced the tenets of Methodism. Another significant difference was that Allen's church, from its founding, had attempted to dissolve its connections with the organized Methodist church that were, in his eyes, restrictive because they did not allow Mother Bethel to function as a truly independent black church.⁶³

In 1796 and again in 1807, Allen drew up an accord containing specific language explaining his church's ideological and theological departure from the white Methodist and the Methodist Episcopal Church. The narrative survives in a document which has come to be known as "The African Supplement." Meant to shake off the control of the elders from the Methodist Church's governing body, "The African Supplement" was formulated as a response to the institution's hold on the church. Broken down into seven articles, several of the "African Supplement's" sections emphasized the separation that Allen's Bethel Church was hoping to achieve from the Methodist Church's formal hierarchy.⁶⁴

In the third and sixth articles, for instance, Allen declared that the right to elect preachers should come from within the congregation and not from the white church's leadership. Allen wrote in the third article:

It is hereby further provided and declared that a majority of the trustees and official members, convened agreeably to notice, given at least one Sabbath day previously to such meeting, shall and may nominate, and appoint, one or more persons of the African race, to exhort and preach in Bethel church, and any other church or churches, which may hereafter become the property of this corporation, for such time and on such conditions as may be agreed on—provided that the exhorters and preachers so nominated and appointed, shall have been regularly licensed by the Quarterly Meeting Conference of the Bethel church." In the sixth article, he wrote, "It is hereby further agreed and declared, that the elder of the Methodist Episcopal Church, for the time being, of the city of Philadelphia, shall in no case nominate any person to preach in Bethel church, or in any church or churches, which shall hereafter become the property of said corporation; unless with the concurrence of a majority of the trustees of the said church, or their successors—and that any nomination made without the concurrence of said trustees or a majority of them, shall be void."⁶⁵

Regardless of Allen's attempts at independence, the Bethel Church remained legally and theologically (at least to an extent), connected to the Methodist Church's hierarchy, which imposed its oversight on virtually all matters of a religious nature. Concerning this tense situation, scholar Richard S. Newman stated that, "as far as white elders were concerned, black congregants must always defer to white clerics." Newman also noted that after the 1807 version of "The African Supplement" was issued, it was seen as a move to reaffirm and move forward with Bethel's original 1796 pledge of "sovereignty."⁶⁶

In response, white Methodists and their lawyers began an almost decade-long campaign to regain control of what they thought was now a renegade African American Episcopal church. Newman contended, "Where Allen claimed that the African Supplement superseded the original charter, Methodist lawyers argued that it illegally seized power from white clerics." The situation heated to a boiling point by the spring of 1815, when the white Methodists put forth what was perhaps their most active challenge yet to what they believed was the "illegally enshrined black control" of Mother Bethel Church.⁶⁷

During this time, the M.E. Church of Philadelphia hired a lawyer, Joseph Hopkinson, who argued that Bethel Church had broken "the union between the two churches" by "obtain[ing] a supplement" that was essentially "void." Because of this, Hopkinson alleged, Allen's church had broken the contract, and the Bethel Church was legally in the hands of the Methodists. Immediately following Hopkinson's declaration, white Methodists "ordered to the sheriff to sell Bethel Church" on June 22, 1815. What was supposed to have been the coup de grace for the black Methodists became a reversal of fortune for the leaders of the white church, who mistakenly believed they would outbid Allen and the Bethelites for the church. With assistance from Philadelphia's African American community, and using money he had earned from his business dealings over the years, Allen procured the church with the highest bid that day.⁶⁸

One more hurdle remained before Bethel realized ultimate independence. Newman explained, if Allen "was going to call Bethel a 'Methodist church,' officials lectured him yet again, then Allen must defer to the resident elder." In December, Robert Burch, the new white presiding elder, attempted to preach at Bethel, but he was blocked by the congregants who filled the church and "stuffed" benches and chairs in the aisles to prevent him from taking the pulpit.⁶⁹

On January 1, 1816, the Methodist Conference filed suit against Bethel "for a writ of mandamus [for Burch] to be reinstated to Bethel's pulpit." Among those arguing on behalf of Allen's Church was Horace Binney, who effectively persuaded the judges that "The African Supplement" did take precedent over the Methodist bylaws, and that the congregants of the Bethel Church were entitled to vote as they pleased in regards to issues concerning the preaching of white elders and ministers, as well as other details regarding the operation of the church. The judges ultimately agreed and sided with Allen and Binney, and Bethel officially achieved its

autonomy as a church that was able to utilize the term “Methodist” but still remain independent.⁷⁰

The Reverend Daniel Coker, commenting on the victory for the Bethel Church in a sermon given in Baltimore on January 21, 1816, remarked:

The Jews in Babylon were held against their will. So were our brethren. But how, it will be asked, were your brethren bound? One, by the deed. Two, by the charter of their church. To whom were they bound? To the conference. For how long were they bound? Answer: It was supposed by the ecclesiastical expounders of the law, that it would be till the last trump should sound! But it will be asked, were they not at liberty to go from under the control of the conference when they thought proper? In answering this we shall disclose a paradox, viz. the conference (as



Harry Burleigh and an unidentified man, 1925. Harry Burleigh wrote spirituals, and while he often worked in New York, his hometown was Erie, Pennsylvania. Photo from Pennsylvania State Archives, Manuscript Group 9. Used with permission.

I have understood) have said repeatedly, that the coloured societies were nothing but an unprofitable trouble; and yet, when the society of Bethel Church unanimously requested to go free, it was not granted, until the supreme court of Pennsylvania said, it should be so. . . . May the time speedily come, when we shall see our brethren come flocking to us like doves to their windows. And we as a band of brethren, shall sit down under our own vine to worship and none to make us afraid.⁷¹

Coker correctly predicted that a time would “speedily come” when those wishing to perpetuate the new church’s independence would “sit down” and meet, for the first General Convention of the newly created African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church commenced in Philadelphia on April 9, 1816. Documents prove that Allen was “elected and ordained Bishop,” and a resolution passed by the convention, “RESOLVED, That the people of Baltimore and Philadelphia and other places who may unite with them shall become one body under the name and style of the

African Methodist Episcopal Church of the United States of North America, and that the Book of Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church be adopted as our Discipline until further orders, excepting that portion relating to presiding elders.” The resolution was signed by Daniel Coker, Richard Williams, Edward Williamson, Henry Harden, Stephen Hill, and Nicholas Gilliard.⁷²

While the 1816 meeting was known as the First General Convention, the July 9, 1820, gathering was formally considered the First General Conference of the AME Church, an event that also took place at the Bethel Church in Philadelphia. While conferences for the newly established church occurred in selected cities and circuits on an annual basis, the General Conference met every four years. This first “official” General Conference was historic because it was convened to address, in Allen’s own words, “larger questions than we had when we met in 1816.”⁷³ On the first day of the meeting, one of the questions posed was: “What are the duties of the General Superintendent or acting Bishop?” The response was: “To preside over all our Conferences, to affix all the appointments of the traveling ministers, in conjunction with his assistants, at the Yearly Conference, but in the interval of the Conference he shall exercise his judgment, in conjunction with one or more of the preachers having the charge of the neighboring circuit or stations, and the Quarterly Conference where he wishes the preacher removed from . . . that no preacher remain on one circuit or station longer than two years, unless the Bishop, in his godly judgment, sees fit otherwise. He is to travel through the connection. He is to ordain Bishops, Elders and Deacons.”⁷⁴ On the third day, the conventioners took up the subject of education. “Where there are ten children, whose parents will allow it, meet them once a week; but where this is impracticable, meet them once in two weeks. Organize Sunday Schools, instruct the children.”⁷⁵ On the fifth day, the assembly pondered, “What are the boundaries of the annual conference?”

The answers were specific:

1. The Baltimore Conference shall include Baltimore City, Eastern Shore of Maryland, Harrisburg, Chambersburg, Lewistown Circuits, Washington City and Piscataway, and all places that may hereafter be brought into the Connection south of that latitude.
2. The Philadelphia Conference will include Philadelphia City, Bucks County, Delaware State, West and East Jersey as far as Rahway, Elizabethtown and Morristown.
3. The New York Conference shall extend from the northern extremity of the Philadelphia District, and as far North and East as the Canadas, including the whole of the New York State.
4. The Ohio Conference shall include all that part of Pennsylvania west of the Allegheny mountains [This would soon become the Allegheny Conference], the States of Ohio and Michigan.

5. The Indiana Conference shall include Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, Kentucky, and Tennessee.
6. The Canada Conference shall include all the Canadas.⁷⁶

To understand the experiences of both the preachers and the congregants of the early African Methodist Episcopal Church, it's necessary to examine the lives of three itinerant ministers who preached on various circuits in Pennsylvania: Daniel A. Payne, Thomas W. Henry, and Jarena Lee.

Daniel A. Payne was born in Charleston, South Carolina, in 1811 to a free African American couple. Trained as a carpenter, Payne opened a school for free blacks, which was later closed due to the effects of Nat Turner's rebellion and the growing mistrust that accompanied it regarding, among other issues, the allowance to practice educational pursuits. Desiring to pursue a religious education, Payne traveled North with the help of individuals from several different denominations, including Congregationalists, Presbyterians, Lutherans, and "the Protestant Episcopal Church."⁷⁷ Upon arriving in New York City, in 1835, he was given the opportunity to study at the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Gettysburg, Adams County, by the Reverend Daniel Strobel, of the Lutheran Church. On his way to Gettysburg, he stopped in Philadelphia where he met "many interesting people," including, "Mr. Joseph Cassey, a colored manufacturer of wigs and other hair-decorations, who had retired on a fortune of about \$75,000"; "the talented Forten family, the head of which was the venerable James Forten"; and the Purvis family, among others. Payne at the time did not support the cause of African colonization because he believed it was supported by white racists. He was pleased to learn Samuel Simon Schmucker, president of the Lutheran Theological Seminary, addressed the issue. "The members of [our] society are not colonizationists," Schmucker said, "but abolitionists, and we desire you to be trained to labor for the intellectual, moral, religious, and social improvement of the free people of color in the United States."⁷⁸

During his theological studies, Payne befriended John Peck, "a local deacon in Carlisle," through whom he became "acquainted with the condition and wants of the A.M. E. Church." "The house of worship was an old fashioned building," he described Carlisle's AME Church. "In its basement . . . a school was kept for colored children, and taught by a Christian white lady, Miss Sarah Bell." He took note of the community's "public institutions," including Dickinson College. He commented that other than a Dr. McIntock, who had written "cogent articles to the Christian Advocate" condemning slavery, "many students from the adjoining slave states gave a strong pro-slavery character to the institution."⁷⁹

Payne was so influenced by Peck that he left the seminary with supporting papers from him and Schmucker, and went to Philadelphia with the initial intention of meeting with the head bishop of the AME Church, Morris Brown, to personally inform him of his calling. Instead, he sidestepped

making this connection with the AME church, because he “was informed” by “a friend of my father” that the independent black church had looked down upon “educated ministers.”⁸⁰

Although Payne joined the Synod of the Lutheran Church in Fordsboro, New York, in 1837, he returned to Philadelphia in 1841, where he was daily “brought into contact with the leading members of the AME Church—Dr. J.J. G. Bias, Rev. Richard Robinson, Bishop Morris Brown, and others.” In the city, he was “repeatedly invited to cast his lot among them,” and recalled that “the more I saw of the AME Church the more I felt it my duty to become identified with it.” In the winter of 1841, he “joined the Quarterly Conference of Bethel, in Philadelphia,” and in spring of the following year, at the Philadelphia Annual Conference, he “was received on trial as a local preacher, and into full connection in May, 1843.”⁸¹

After working first in churches in Washington, D.C., and Baltimore, Payne sailed to Europe in 1846, returning and eventually moving to Canada to preach in 1848. During a tour of the West in 1851, he traveled though Pittsburgh. Timing was opportune—the Allegheny Institute was being established by the Reverend Charles Avery. Payne interviewed the Reverend Samuel Collins in Pittsburgh, an itinerant minister of the AME Church, who preached from Ohio to West Chester, and from whom he collected materials for his book on the history of the AME Church.

Payne wrote that his first official “Episcopal acts” took place in 1852 in “the session of the Philadelphia Annual Conference, held in Union Bethel Church.” Over the next decade, he traveled as a bishop throughout the United States and Canada, returning to Pennsylvania for several important occasions. The first of these was his trip to Pittsburgh for the General Conference of the AME Church meeting at the Wiley Street Chapel, and the second was to Philadelphia for the General Conference in 1864, where it was discussed at Mother Bethel Church to form “a union of the Zion Connection with our church.” Payne visited the Wesley Chapel of the AME Zion Church, and he negotiated an agreement between the two churches that was ratified in 1868.⁸²

After traveling again to Europe, Payne returned in 1870 and attended the Annual Conference in Pittsburgh in 1871, at which he met “a particularly interesting class of men who were active and progressive.” He described them as “three of them were regular students of theology—two at Allegheny and one at Meadville, the former a Presbyterian School and the latter Unitarian.” During his return trip to the East, he spoke of what was his last significant trip through western Pennsylvania, an experience which he cited as leading to “several pleasing reminiscences.” During his visit to Canonsburg, he “found a larger and better constructed house of worship than at Washington,” adjacent to “a burial-ground consisting of three acres” and a “schoolhouse erected for the benefit of the colored children.” He continued traveling throughout the South during the following two decades, made another tour of Europe, and died at the age of 82 in 1893.⁸³

Like Payne, the Reverend Thomas W. Henry had also witnessed among his travels as an itinerant minister a great deal of the religious culture in Pennsylvania. Henry's life, however, seems to parallel, at least in part, the life of Richard Allen, as he was not a freeborn individual who was able to receive an education at an early age but, instead, was born a slave. His life was less like Payne's in several significant ways as well; he did not become a bishop and he had more experiences preaching among the rural churches than Payne. Unlike Payne, too, he dealt less with administrative duties, although he was appointed a deacon and as a church elder.

In *From Slavery to Salvation: the Autobiography of the Rev. Thomas W. Henry of the AME Church*, published in 1872, he wrote he was born on January 1, 1794, in "Leonardtwn, St. Mary's county, Maryland." His owner, a prosperous proprietor of tobacco plantations in Maryland, had amassed not only a small fortune but also, according to Henry, "nine hundred and sixty-nine slaves." Henry's grandmother who lived to be 109 years old, was the "housekeeper of to my master from the time of his arrival until his death, which was in April, 1804." She had twenty children, one of which was his mother, and he wrote that she "gave birth to twelve children, all slaves to my master, and at his death he willed all his slaves to be free." However, Maryland law prohibited slaves older than forty-five being freed, and many of them were sold, including Henry's father, Thomas Henry Sr.⁸⁴

The younger Henry recounted that he "was raised in the Catholic faith, and followed that denomination until I was nineteen years old, and was catechized as well as could be reasonably expected from an uneducated boy." He was apprenticed to Abraham King, a blacksmith in Hagerstown, Maryland, where, he declared, he found religion. He recollected that King was "a religious man—a German Methodist, called United Brethren," who took Henry to a "camp-meeting" in Virginia, just across the Potomac, where "in the woods adjoining a farm owned by a Mr. Peter Light, he would for the first time feel 'the spirit of God moving upon me.'" Eighteen months later, Henry "felt that [he] was called upon to advise my many friends and acquaintances to seek the salvation of their souls."⁸⁵

After returning to his home in Leonardtown, he became "a full member of the M.E. Church" and he began to "assist" in funeral rites at the church. He became "capable" of preaching the "Word of God" after passing an examination given by Reverend James Reed, who was "the elder in charge" of the local M.E. Circuit, making him able to "lead prayer-meetings, bury the dead, and in emergency, baptise children, whenever they were sick."⁸⁶ When commenting about his attendance at one of the Quarterly Conferences of the M.E. Church, held in the early 1820s and led by an elder, Edward Smith, he emphasized he was elated because, for the first time, "all the white and colored" men "met together on this occasion." Unfortunately, however, he claimed the majority of the elders "were against" this interracial meeting.⁸⁷

After he began to preach fulltime in 1834, at the age of forty, he realized that the slave system in the South was firmly entrenched—even in his own denomination. He recalled that he counseled a crying child whose mother was sold by the church steward to the South. He mentioned that he was chastised by a “colored preacher” for being part of a church that would not permit its “colored brethren to preach in Bethel Church.” These aspects of serving as an African American preacher in a white congregation were inconsistent with the church’s treatment of its black preachers and parishioners, and it eventually caught up with Henry.⁸⁸

Henry compared his life to Moses, the Jewish prophet who had also been called to serve God at the age of forty. Henry was “ordained Deacon by the Right Rev. Maurice Brown, at Baltimore, Md.” In 1837 and 1838, he was “ordained an Elder in full by the same bishop.” He served for eight years on “the Washington and Frederick County” Maryland circuits. Henry was placed in 1845 and then again in 1858 “on the Chambersburg and Carlisle Circuit,” establishing a foothold in the south central region of Pennsylvania with which he would be associated for the remainder of his life. While Henry did not discuss in great detail much of his duties while on this circuit, the editor of his autobiography, Jean Libby, provided in her historical essay in the current edition a great deal of insight about what Henry had experienced on this circuit.⁸⁹ “Rev. Thomas W. Henry began his travels out of Maryland with his assignment to the Chambersburg and Carlisle Circuit in 1845,” she wrote. “The town of Chambersburg, directly north of Hagerstown, Maryland, is above the Mason-Dixon line that separated slave from free states. It was his first life in a community without slaves. The St. James AME congregation had purchased their church property in 1839, just six years before Rev. Henry’s assignment there. The congregation itself has been recorded since 1811, evolving from the Methodist Episcopal denomination. A log church (which had previously been a Catholic church and moved to the site in 1812) functioned for the congregation until 1872, when the present church on South Main Street was built.”⁹⁰

Libby maintained that a scenario which Henry only briefly touched upon when he returned to the circuit in 1858 was much more dramatic than he portrayed. He was “drawn into” a feud “between the AME congregation and the John Wesley AME Zion congregation in Chambersburg.” Both church histories mentioned Henry as being a mediator of the dispute. According to Henry’s autobiography, he was appointed to preach on the Lewistown and Hollidaysburg circuit one year later, in 1859. In 1862, he wrote the “Conference appointed me to the Lancaster (Pa.) Circuit,” where he “found the church . . . in a very bad condition.” He worked with the Reverend Robert Boston to get “the church under a good slate roof.” In an unusual occurrence during his time on this circuit, he became involved in a squabble between “two sisters” in Marietta, Lancaster County. After he took sides with one of them, he “offended the other party,” which led to a libel suit against him for which he was ultimately acquitted.⁹¹

Looking at the AME *Christian Recorder* for validation and a clearer description of Henry’s life on the circuit in Pennsylvania, several interesting details surface that he did not discuss in his

autobiography, although there is no mention of any legal troubles. For instance, in the August 9, 1862, edition, the AME Church at Marietta was “under the pastoral care of Rev. Thomas Henry,” which was to “be consecrated on the 17th of this month.” On August 30, the Recorder published an account of the dedication ceremony:

The AME Church, in Marietta, was dedicated to the service of Almighty God, Elder J.H. Smith, of Burlington Circuit, officiating. After the reading services were concluded, the name of the church was announced by Rev. Thomas Henry, as follows: The Daughter of Bethel, after which the consecration song was sung, and when concluded the following text was announced by Elder J.H. Smith, Revelation, first chapter and last clause of the twelfth verse. And when this great service was concluded, we proceeded to take up a collection for the benefit of the church, and raised the sum of thirty dollars. T.H. HENRY, Elder in charge of Lancaster Circuit.⁹²

The *Recorder* also provides an aspect of Henry’s life that was sad. On June 3, 1865, writing from Philadelphia, he submitted an article to the journal entitled “Information Wanted” in which he pleaded with the public to share any knowledge as to the whereabouts of one of his children who was sold into slavery when he was living in Maryland in the 1820s. He begged for information about “Asberry or Rousbey Henry, who was sold from Hagerstown, Maryland, to Tallahassee, Florida, in 1838. When last heard from, in 1847, he was at the latter place. Any information of his whereabouts will be most thankfully received by his father. REV. THOMAS W. HENRY, Care Rev. E. Weaver, Box 2975 Philadelphia, Penna.” Henry confirmed in his autobiography that dealing with this loss was a burden he carried throughout his life, and he commented that as a young man in about 1826 or 1827 he fathered three children with a woman who was still a slave, and after doling out the money for them “the price of poor colored people had increased, and the remaining two of my children were sold.”⁹³

Black Women in the Churches

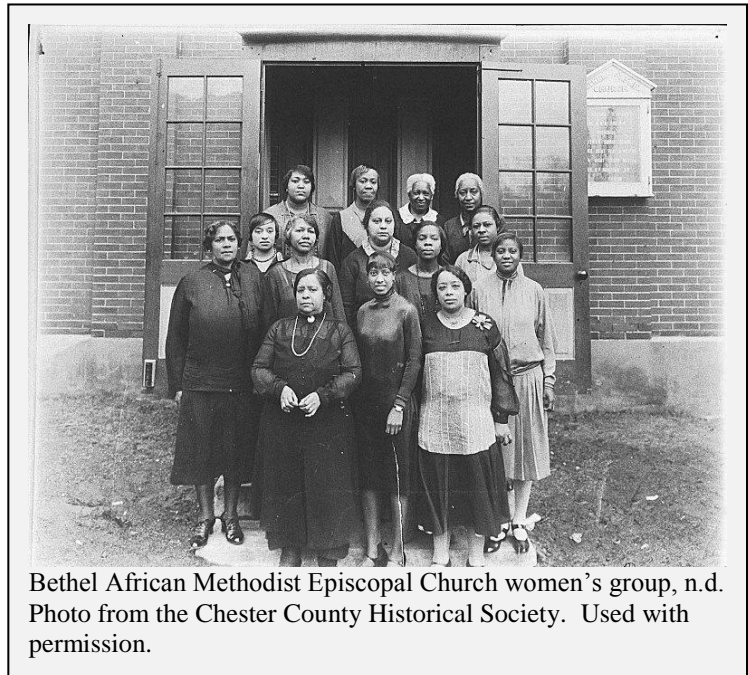
While there was certainly gender discrimination in the early black churches in Pennsylvania, religion also helped to break down barriers based on sex and ethnicity. Jarena Lee’s affiliation with the early AME Church highlights, among other issues, the role that gender played in preaching and participating in the formal organization of the 19th-century independent black church. Lee (whose maiden name remains unknown) penned, in 1849, an autobiography detailing her work in the church. Entitled *Religious Experiences and Journal of Mrs. Jarena Lee*, the book provides tremendous insight into the daily experiences of a traveling preacher, especially a woman, and vividly describes the growth and development of the AME church in Pennsylvania, Maryland, Ohio, and Canada during the first half of the 19th century.⁹⁴

Born into slavery in Cape May, New Jersey, on February 11, 1783, Lee was separated from her parents at the age of seven and sent “to live as a servant maid.” At the age of twenty-one, she underwent what she felt was her first religious experience after joining “with others to hear a missionary of the Presbyterian order preach.” Deeply affected by the preacher’s “reading of the Psalms,” Lee believed herself to be a sinner and decided to commit suicide by drowning herself in a brook located “about a quarter mile from my house.” However, the “unseen arm of God” saved her that day from such an unfortunate fate, and several years later, after traveling to Philadelphia, she visited Richard Allen’s Bethel Church, where she experienced her conversion to Methodism.⁹⁵ It was at Bethel, she declared, that she found “the people to which my heart unites.” Elaborating on her revelation that the word of God had filled her spirit, she believed, “That instant, it appeared to me as if a garment, which had entirely enveloped my whole person, even to my fingers’ ends, split at the crown of my head and was stripped away from me, passing like a shadow from sight—when the glory of God seemed to cover me in its stead.”⁹⁶

In 1809, several years after her “sanctification,” Lee heard an inner voice encouraging her to “Go Preach the Gospel.” She immediately responded by visiting Richard Allen at his home to seek guidance. Allen told her that “a Mrs. Cook, a Methodist lady [within the white Methodist Church], had also some time before requested the same privilege,” and that her appeal was granted by the church’s elders who allowed her to “hold prayer meetings.” Allen counseled her, however, that “it did not call for women preachers.”⁹⁷ Temporarily

abandoning the idea, she married Joseph Lee, the pastor of the Snow Hill Church, in Snow Hill, New Jersey, “about six miles from the city of Philadelphia.” Snow Hill, a church run by the local African Religious Society, eventually became Mt. Pisgah Church of Lawnside (which it remains to this day). Six years later, in 1817, Lee’s husband died, leaving her to care for her “two infant children, one of the age of about two years, the other six months,” a turning point in her life with which she built upon to “renew” her “call to preach.”⁹⁸

When she first met with Allen, to whom she referred as the “Bishop of the African Episcopal Methodists in America,” he granted her the authority to conduct prayer meetings in her house. One day, however, as she sat for worship in Allen’s church while listening to Reverend Richard



Williams preach, Lee acted upon a “supernatural impulse” to take over the reverend’s sermon because she claimed he “lost the spirit.” After she finished her exhortation, Bishop Allen took to the pulpit and, much to Lee’s surprise, changed his mind and agreed to allow her to preach in the church—which she had proposed to him eight years earlier. Lee recounted Allen’s words to the congregation that day: she was “called to that work, as any of the preachers present” and in effect amended the very bylaws of the African Methodist Episcopal Church by formally sanctioning the right of a woman to preach. Returning to South Jersey, Lee preached as an itinerant minister in a number of “Methodist meetinghouses,” and in November 1821 she returned to Philadelphia where she “held meetings in the dwelling house of a sister Lydia Anderson” for a period of “about three months.”⁹⁹

Following another tour of congregations in New Jersey, Delaware, and Maryland in 1822, Lee attended the New York Annual Conference in June 1823 with Bishops Allen and Brown, where she spoke at the Asbury and the Bethel churches, as well as at the Church of High Street in Brooklyn. She encountered one of her first great challenges after returning to Mother Bethel Church in Philadelphia in autumn 1823 to accept an appointment by Allen to preach there. She realized that “a spirit of opposition arose among the people against the propriety of female preaching.” Undeterred, she continued preaching. “Shall I cease from sounding the alarm to an ungodly world, when the vengeance of offended heaven is about to be poured out,” she asked rhetorically, “because my way is sometimes beset with scoffers, or those who lose sight of the great Object, and stop on the road to glory to contend about non-essentials?”¹⁰⁰

Although her response was negative, she decided to walk twenty-one miles to preach in the “African Church” in Lumberton, New Jersey. Returning to the Philadelphia area in January 1824, Lee remarked that she prayed God would enlighten those needing to be “saved by grace through the instrumentality of female preaching.” She also said Bishop Morris procured for her a church in nearby Norristown, a Montgomery County community where she chose to speak on Isaiah 54, Verse 1, which she proclaimed “Who hath believed our report? And to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?” It was a telling subject concerning her recent run-in with those who did not appreciate a woman’s ability to preach.¹⁰¹

Spending much of the remainder of 1824 traveling and preaching in Maryland, Lee returned to Pennsylvania to travel the West Chester and Lancaster circuits in spring 1825. Stopping in Lancaster, she noted “they had a new Church, but [it was] not paid for,” as “the proprietor took the key in possession and deprived them of worshipping God in it.” Instead, she “spoke at a dwelling house,” after which she traveled to nearby Columbia to preach at an AME Church and lead class and conduct prayer meetings.”¹⁰²

She next “proceeded to Carlisle,” where she met with “a small body of members.” She remained in Carlisle for ten days, issuing sermons and teaching adults and children. Lee was obviously

excited about the results of the visit to the next community on her trip, Shippensburg, also in Cumberland County, because she mentioned that while there “fifteen joined the church” and “some of the most hardened sinners became serious and reformed.” Concluding her tour in Chambersburg, she met with a Reverend Winton and a Reverend Snowden. The Reverend Winton “offered to pay my bill for a room at the Inn,” she recalled.¹⁰³

Lee’s subsequent travels took her to Ohio, Maryland, New Jersey, and upstate New York. She did not mention significant speaking engagements in Pennsylvania until summer 1830, when she noted that she had spoken in Wilkes-Barre. While in the Luzerne County seat, Lee drew a multi-racial audience. She preached to “both white and colored, Baptists and Methodists, and had an invitation to preach in the afternoon.” Her experiences were “good congregations, and tears of contrition were visible in many places.”¹⁰⁴

Recounting her return to Philadelphia in late autumn 1831, following a period during which she was “absent for two years and six months” from the city she called “home,” she wrote, “I found Bishop Allen in very ill health, but he ever had continued with unwearied interest in my son's welfare, by sending to school, and otherwise improving him in education; by which he has made considerable improvements therefrom. . . . but the Rev. Bishop coming to the steep of time, departed this life March 26th, 1832, after seeing 72 years in a world of affliction. Immediately afterwards I placed my son with a French gentlemen, with whom he stayed and learned my son the Cabinet-making business in this city.”¹⁰⁵

Lee traveled throughout New York and New Jersey for much of the next several years, although she returned to Philadelphia on numerous occasions to speak at Mother Bethel, Wesley AME, Wesley AME Zion, and the African Zoar Church in the city’s Northern Liberties section. It was her travels in central and western Pennsylvania in the summer and fall of 1838 that provide additional insight into the development of the independent black church in the region and offer a glimpse at the lives and working culture of those to whom she preached. On her way to Lewistown, she traveled by canal, noting that she had “a pleasant passage.” In Lewistown, she was “kindly treated” and “preached four sermons to a hard people.” Lee “pressed on to Huntingdon, found a small society suffering for want of help. I was received by all the brethren, preached five sermons, rode 11 miles and spoke to the Forgemmen, but through bad management the congregation was small, but the word had its effect; the souls of the redeemed are precious. I next proceeded to Hollidaysburg. Took passage by stage at night, arrived at 8 o'clock A.M. I was kindly received by a gentleman belonging to Wesley church, and entertained in a friendly manner. Preached two sermons to a comfortable congregation, and then left for Johnstown.”¹⁰⁶

Upon her arrival in Johnstown, she remarked upon the discrimination that African Americans endured daily while living in such a remote place, which she described as “at the end of the world as regards accommodations. I had to stand near one hour before I could get a person to

carry my trunk.” When someone finally appeared, it was an unnamed African American barber and his wife, who put her up in their house where she had held several prayer meetings. She closed her tour by traveling to Pittsburgh and then to Williamsport, Lycoming County, and returning to Philadelphia in September 1839.¹⁰⁷

Jarena Lee’s story is only part of the history of the AME Church’s relatively progressive nature regarding gender and religious work during the 19th century. Scholar Jeane B. Williams identified several black women who successfully broke down barriers in a similar fashion, including Harriet Baker (1829-1913), appointed in 1889 “by the Philadelphia AME Conference to take charge of St. Paul’s Church on Tenth Street, in the city of Lebanon, Pennsylvania.’ As “the only female pastor in the Lancaster District,” Baker was widely respected by a number of Pennsylvania’s prominent African American religious leaders who wielded great power in the AME Church in the late 19th century. “Her work was endorsed by AME bishops John Brown, Richard Cain, Jabez P. Campbell, T. M. D. Ward, and Henry M. Turner, from each of whom she received authority to preach.” Baker was received “with open arms” by white evangelicals in Pennsylvania; in one memorable instance she “held a revival that lasted for three weeks and witnessed the conversion of seventy-two people.”

In addition, Williams’s research on the subject in denominations other than the AME church which had witnessed women named to leadership roles or simply stifled their quest for upward mobility, also yields some amazing facts. For instance, Williams noted the AME Zion Church, in 1876, “voted to strike out the word ‘male’ in its Book of Discipline” and women such as Julia Foote, “a conference missionary” to the New York Annual Conference in 1894, “was ordained a deacon.” Also supporting her argument was the story of the 20th century churchwoman, elder Ida Robinson who, as a pastor of “Mt. Olive Holy Church, United Holy Church of America, Philadelphia,” had withdrawn “from the denomination and established a new organization in 1924.”¹⁰⁸

Of Robinson’s new church, “Mt. Sinai Church of America,” Williams believed that within its organizational framework “women assumed leadership roles—almost unheard of in those days.” Regarding the latter phenomenon, however, Williams employed as her example the struggles of women to attain positions of leadership within the Baptist church, as she had stated that throughout much of the 19th and 20th centuries “both black and white, the participation of the female members was circumscribed. . . . The ordained ministry in general and the pastorate in particular remained unattainable for women...”¹⁰⁹

One more scholarly anecdote should be noted concerning the role of African American women in the pulpit, and it comes from the pen of the African American Religious Historian Lewis V. Baldwin. Baldwin exhorts us to remember that women in the Union African Church, established by Richard Spencer in 1813, were apparently afforded even greater opportunities to both preach

and be promoted within its church hierarchy, than in the AME and the AME Zion churches, and he noted in his work entitled *Invisible Strands of African Methodism* that, "Women in the Union Church of Africans were given an opportunity very early to fill a role that was not so readily available to females in the AME, the AME Zion, and other black denominations. . . . It is known that women such as Mother Ferreby Draper, Araminta Jenkins, and Annes Spencer did perform duties traditionally associated with ministry."¹¹⁰

As Christianity took hold in African American culture independent churches of other denominations proliferated. One of these churches, the African Zoar Church (also known as the African Zoar United Methodist Church and the Zoar M.E. Church) was not mentioned during the discussion of the developments surrounding the withdrawal of black congregants from the St. George's Congregation in 1794, yet it played a critical role in that story as well. The black parishioners who founded this were individuals who had remained affiliated with St. George's United Methodist Church during Allen's and Jones' walk-out. Instead of simply leaving the congregation behind to organize a new church as these men and their followers had done, they filed, according to Roger Lane, a "petition in 1794 for formal permission to meet at their own place." Once this building was procured, the congregants who met in a "single room" were "wholly dependent on visiting white ministers until it built its own plain brick building in 1838." Matt Sauer and Neeta Desai contended African Zoar United Methodist Church's "first meeting place was at an abandoned butcher shop at 4th and Brown Streets," and it was "dedicated by Bishop Francis Asbury in August of 1796" and that "in 1883, Zoar purchased a red brick structure at 12th and Melon streets, a site that it still occupies." It is important to remember, however, that the Zoar Church would not see its first full-time African-American pastor until 1835, a "Rev. Perry Tilghman, who served until 1844."¹¹¹

The founding of the First African Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia (FAPCP) was a critical moment in the development of independent black churches or relatively autonomous congregations in Pennsylvania's history, yet, in terms of this particular event, it also holds national implications. The FAPCP, founded in 1807 by John Gloucester, a former slave from Tennessee who had been baptized in the Presbyterian faith by his former master Gideon Blackburn, was not only the first of its kind in Pennsylvania but also the first African American Presbyterian Congregation in the United States. According to Matthew S. Hopper, who compiled a rich and thorough study on Philadelphia's early black churches for the Preservation Alliance of Greater Philadelphia, the church erected "its first building at Seventh and Bainbridge Streets in 1810." Hopper also described Gloucester's experiences and the development of his church.

"By touring Europe and giving lectures on the perils of American slavery," Hopper wrote, "Gloucester was able to raise the necessary funds to purchase his wife out of bondage. Before his death in 1822, Gloucester had four sons; each trained for the ministry at Princeton. His oldest

son, Jeremiah, founded Second African Presbyterian Church in 1824. In 1844, his second son, Stephen, founded Central Presbyterian Church, which moved to Lombard Street in 1848 after the construction of its new building near Ninth Street. It then adopted the name Lombard Street Central Presbyterian Church. Its Lombard Street building featured a stone obelisk monument in its courtyard as a memorial to its founder.”¹¹²

While writing his narrative, Hopper discovered that, among Philadelphia’s African American Baptists, who had been allowed to “worship in white congregations since 1746,” an incident in which thirteen congregants at the white First Baptist Church “received their voluntary letters of dismissal” to organize the First African Baptist Church occurred in 1809. Following the church’s creation, Hopper wrote it was “immediately recognized as a regular Baptist congregation at the annual meeting of the Philadelphia Baptist Association in October 1809.” He also noted that “the young congregation began meeting in a building at 10th and Vine under the leadership of its first pastor, Henry Cunningham.”¹¹³

Regarding the development of a purely independent black church, however, such as Allen’s AME Church, which, when consecrated in 1816, essentially had no formal affiliation with any overseeing white denominational body, unlike the Zoar Church, the First African Presbyterian, and the African Baptist Congregations, we find that two other churches also became trailblazers on this path towards virtual autonomy and made their presence known within the state of Pennsylvania by the early 1820s.

Beginning with a brief discussion of the origins of the AME Zion Church, we see that in 1796 in New York City, this denomination would travel along a similar path as had Mother Bethel, as a number of African-American congregants from the heavily black John Street Methodist Church left due to poor treatment and discrimination and opened their own church. First known as the African Chapel and then soon after as the Zion Church, the house of worship was “blessed” by Methodist Bishop Francis Asbury. As the church had still not allowed for the ordainment of African American elders by 1820, however, the congregation in that same year decided to take matters into their own hands and formally separate from the white Methodist Church’s authority. Richard Allen initially became involved with this matter as he tried to absorb the church into his newly created AME denomination yet he was spurned by the members of the Zion Church, who thus created their own independent black church, in which three elders were ordained with James Varick becoming the first African-American Bishop of the newly created African-Methodist Episcopal Church (incidentally, the word “Zion” would not be incorporated into its new name until 1848 as it operated as the AMEC. from 1821 to 1848 and the AMEZ. after 1848.)¹¹⁴

Growth of the Churches

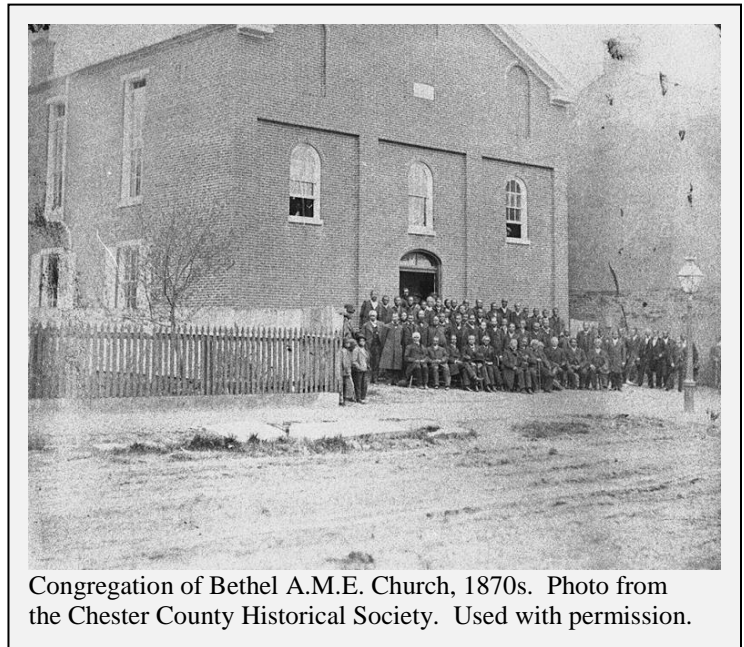
From their beginnings, AMEC and AMEZ churches spread quickly in Pennsylvania. One of their earliest manifestations was the Wesley African Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia,

which itself had been created as a breakaway AME church in 1820 by members who had become disillusioned with the city's Bethelites. To make this separation from Allen's church even more distinct, the Wesley Church joined the AMEC church in 1822, and exists today as the Wesley AME Zion Church. The church is no longer located in its original building, but in an edifice purchased in 1885 on the 1500 block of Locust Street.¹¹⁵

The third of the independent black Methodist churches to splinter from the white hierarchy in the early 19th century (other than the AME church and the Zionites) was the Union African Church, founded by Peter Spencer in Wilmington, Delaware, in 1813. While an active debate continues in the academic community whether Spencer's church actually predated Allen's Bethel Church in its shedding of white Methodist authority, the church made its way into Pennsylvania at least by the early 1820s. Some of the debate centers on the fact that, although Spencer appears to have established his church in 1813, he attended one of the first AME organizational meetings in Baltimore in 1816, where he disagreed with Allen and their relations ended.¹¹⁶

Known also as the Union Church of Africans or the Union Church of African Methodist Protestants, the church had, as of 1837, at least seven congregations with active members, which the *Colored American*, a national black journal, enumerated as: "New Garden, 200 Pennsburgh, 50 East Fallowfield, 65 Lancaster City, 25 Chesnut Hill, 40 Kingessing, 75 Old Chester, 50 Philadelphia, 350 Haddington Village, 20 New London, 80 Little Brittain, 100, and Columbia, 20." It is possible the East Fallowfield church served the original congregation of the present-day

UAME church in Coatesville (UAME splintered from UAMP in 1866); it was identified as being established in 1820. Most of the early manifestations of this church appeared in the southeastern section of Pennsylvania, bordering Spencer's original Wilmington, Delaware, congregation. By 1843, the Hosanna AUMP church was established in Chester County and played a seminal role in the Underground Railroad.¹¹⁷



To research census figures of Pennsylvania's African American churches in the 19th century, scholars rely on several documents that exist in the historical record. In Philadelphia, for instance, a great deal of information can be obtained by looking at a progression of censuses of

churches taken from various accounts, beginning with the first, an 1813 tract compiled by W. E. B. Du Bois for his seminal 1899 work entitled *The Philadelphia Negro*. Du Bois listed the African American congregations in the city in 1813:

St. Thomas', P.E.....	560
Bethel, A.M.E.....	1272
Zoar, M.E.....	80
Union, A.M.E.....	74
Baptist, Race and Vine Streets.....	80
Presbyterian.....	300
Total.....	2366

In his 1998 study, Matthew Hopper took information concerning Philadelphia's black churches circa 1830 from E. L. Carey's and A. Hart's *Philadelphia in 1830-1, or a Brief Account of Various Institutions and Public Objects in the Metropolis Forming a Complete Guide for Strangers and a Useful Compendium for the Inhabitants*. Carey and Hart listed "St. Thomas' Episcopal" as being located at 5th and Adelphi streets; the "First African Presbyterian Church" at 7th and Shippen (later renamed Lombard) streets; the "Second African Presbyterian" at 2nd Street and Norris Alley; the "First African Baptist" at 8th and Vine streets; the "African Baptist" at 13th and Vine streets; the "Bethel AME" at 6th and Pine streets; the "Union AME" at Old York Road and Coates Street; the "Zoar Methodist" at 4th and Brown streets; the Wesley AMEC at 5th and Lombard streets; and an unnamed AME church at 5th Street and Gill's Alley.¹¹⁸

Du Bois's compilation of Philadelphia's black churches during the mid- to late 19th century entitled "Statistics of Negro Churches, 1867," essentially serves as a census that not only highlights the rich diversity of the city's African American churches of the period, but also reflects the development of these churches in the Commonwealth as a whole.

Name.	Founded.	Number of Members.	Value of Property.	Pastors' Salary.
P.E.—				
St. Thomas'	1792	(N.A.)	(N.A.)	(N.A.)
Methodist—				
Bethel	1794	1,100	\$50,000	\$600
Union	1827	467	\$40,000	\$850

Wesley	1817	464	\$21,000	\$700
Zoar	1794	400	\$12,000	(N.A.)
John Wesley	1844	42	\$3,000	No regular salary.
Little Wesley	1821	310	\$11,000	\$500
Pisgah	1831	116	\$4,600	\$430
Zion City Mission	1,858	90	\$4,500	(N.A.)
Little Union	1837	200	(N.A.)	(N.A.)
Baptist—				
First Baptist	1809	360	\$5,000	(N.A.)
Union Baptist	(N.A.)	400	\$7,000	\$600
Shiloh	1842	405	\$16,000	\$600
Oak Street	1827	137	(N.A.)	(N.A.)
Presbyterian—				
First Presbyterian	1,807	200	\$8,000	(N.A.)
Second Presbyterian	1824	(N.A.)	(N.A.)	(N.A.)
Central Presbyterian	1844	240	\$16,000	(N.A.) ¹¹⁹

Although there is little information about rural black congregations, other congregations were founded in localities such as Pittsburgh, Wilkes-Barre, and Montrose.

Pittsburgh's first independent African American church was Bethel AME, organized in 1818 "in a downtown home between Third and Fourth Avenues near Smithfield Street by three freedmen:

James Coleman, George Coleman, and Abraham Lewis.” Also known as the Wylie Avenue Church, it was rebuilt on the “Hill District site at Wylie Avenue and Elm Street in 1906,” and “the current structure was built in 1959” at 2720 Webster Avenue. The Bethel Church was joined in 1836 by the John Wesley African Methodist Episcopal Zion Mission located in “Charlotte Maloney’s home on Roberts Street,” which moved to Linton Street where a “one-story building” was purchased and “affectionately known as ‘Little Jim.’” The church then moved to an ornate “Gothic structure” at “40-42 Arthur Street” but was demolished in 1945 “for the Crawford-Roberts Project.” It is currently located at 594 Herron Avenue.¹²⁰

The John Wesley AME Zion was joined by a second AME Zion congregation several years later, as well as a second AME Congregation, both of which were located across the river in Allegheny City, (incorporated as part of Pittsburgh and now known as the North Side). In 1846, the founder of Zion AME, the Reverend Charles Avery, established the Avery Mission as an important black industrial educational training institute for “black migrant workers in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.” It was “razed for the I-279 development in 1969.”¹²¹

In northeastern Pennsylvania, in the picturesque community of Montrose, Susquehanna County, the Bethel Church was established in 1848 with the purchase of a building “bounded on the east by the center of the Bridgewater and Wilkes-Barre Turnpike Road.” In addition, the AME Zion Church on Berry Street, in Montrose, was established, according to Debra Adleman, first “in 1844 in a small home where the old country jail stands,” and then built on Berry Street, where “the building still stands” but “the electricity is disconnected.” In one of the region’s newspapers, the *Independent Republican*, a notice appeared on December 22, 1863, illustrating the importance of both churches to Montrose’s late 19th century black community. Reporting that “a Jubilee Meeting” was to be held in the community on January 1, 1864, “to celebrate the Emancipation Proclamation,” the article encouraged citizens to meet at “9 am at Zion Church,” to depart for a “march to Bethel church, where the exercises will take place.”¹²²

Fifty miles south of Montrose, according to Emerson J. Moss, influenced by the Bethel AME movement, in 1848 “a Negro congregation was formed by the Rev. Thomas M. C. Ward in Wilkes-Barre which met in private homes. One home was reportedly at North Main and North streets and another at North Pennsylvania Avenue and Jackson streets, an area where most Negroes resided at the time.” After moving to a building on “Mechanic’s Alley between Washington and Canal [Pennsylvania] streets,” which was “dedicated on November 30, 1856,” the church was formally incorporated as the African Methodist Episcopal Church of Wilkes-Barre on August 3, 1869, first at 146 South Fell Street and then at 172 South State Street “where the church remained until 1918.”¹²³

It appears that the origins of the AME Zion church in the city actually predated the AME Church, possibly because the location was equally distant from New York and Philadelphia. Of

the AME Zion Church's founding, Morris believed "a congregation was formed in 1842 by the Rev. Thomas Jackson," which ended after the minister left the region but was "revived again in 1845 by the Rev. Phillip Lamb and the Rev. Peter Fulmer," typically gathering in "private homes" for worship. According to Moss, in May 1850, "Jacob Hill, Richard Hazen, John Thomas, Jacob White and Henry Brown" acting as "trustees for the African AME Zion Church," purchased "a lot for 400.00 on East Northampton Street for a church and school house." The church later moved to "220 East Northampton Street, near the corner of Welles Street," and had a congregation of 500 strong.¹²⁴ The spread of the African American church in the Commonwealth during the 20th century is significant.

The 1910 Negro Business Directory, employed as a tool to uncover numerous denominations and congregations, yields information about the religious experiences of African Americans that is rich and detailed.

One phenomenon the Directory reveals is the growth and spread of the black Baptist Church which, apart from Philadelphia, did not attract large numbers until doing so in the Pittsburgh region during the mid- to late 19th century (and in the rest of the Commonwealth by the early 20th). Along with the Great Migration came a sizable number of African-Americans who practiced the Baptist religion, and many churches were established after they settled in various cities.¹²⁵

For instance, in McKeesport, Allegheny County, just south of Pittsburgh, the town, in 1910, counted among its "population of colored people, 1,200" two churches, one Baptist and one AME. For the "colored population" of 200 in Rochester, Beaver County, about forty miles north of Pittsburgh, only one church was Baptist. This was largely because the coal, railroad, hotel, and domestic service industries essentially saw its African-American population come from the South. In the center of the Commonwealth, at Altoona, Blair County, three churches served 800 African American residents: "AME, 1; AME Zion, 1; Baptist, 1." In Johnstown, with its 500 African American residents, there were only two churches, an AME and a Baptist, and Bellefonte, Centre County, counted one active AME congregation.¹²⁶

Harrisburg, with its population of 4,500 African-Americans in 1910, had many more congregations spanning the same spectrum than Pittsburgh and Philadelphia. Among the ten churches listed were "AMEZ., 2; AME, 1; Presbyterian, 1; Episcopal, 1; M.E., 1;" and "Baptist, 4." Profiling a minister from the AMEZ. church who had also been a successful businessman (and also was a noted educator as well), the Directory noted that

Rev. W. H. Marshall is a graduate of the grammar high schools of Harrisburg, being one of the first colored boys to graduate from the High School. He became a teacher in our public schools, where he has remained for several years. He was ordained a minister in the

AME Zion Church, and held a charge in Wrightsville and Middletown, where he labored for several years in connection with his school work. He is now pastor of Harris AME Zion Church, this city, which was recently built at a cost of \$6,000. Mr. Marshall's work in this city as a teacher and minister has been exceedingly successful, and its impress for good has been felt by the entire community.¹²⁷

In nearby Steelton, where the "Pennsylvania Steel Company has for years...been large employers of Negro labor, both skilled and unskilled," two of the three churches were Baptist (the third was AME) as most of the community's African American residents were new migrants looking for jobs. The same was true for Connellsville in Fayette County, where the coal industry was beginning to attract southern migrants and where three-quarters of the African American population of 1,000 residents worshipped in its three Baptist churches (the remaining church was AME). By 1910, Wilkes-Barre added to its AME and AME Zion congregations two new Baptist churches, although to the southeast, Allentown, in Lehigh County, with its population of 150 African-Americans had no churches listed and Bethlehem had only one, an AME Zion congregation. In the far northwestern section of Pennsylvania, in Meadville, Crawford County, and Erie, Erie County, only one church was identified in each community in 1910, and both were recorded as AMEs.¹²⁸

One way to more clearly understand the broad yet complex picture underlying the religious experiences of African Americans in Pennsylvania during the 20th century is by considering first person interviews of individuals who, in selected communities across Pennsylvania, shared the many social, cultural, political, economic and spiritual associations that they had (and continue to have) with their churches. In Mt Union, Bernard Chatman recounted what he knew of the history of the Mount Hope Baptist Church, founded in 1918, and the Bethel AME, established in 1917. Chatman, who was born in 1950, related the story of how his parents, as well as his uncles and aunts, had traveled from the South during the Great Migration to work in Mt. Union's brickyards. "Now, Mount Hope Baptist was the church that I grew up in," he said. "But that's on my mother's side. On my father's side was the Bethel AME church, and that church was the church that was founded by my Uncle Dave Chatham and Annie Chatham."¹²⁹

Of the African American families who lived in Kistler, a company housing village created for workers in 1915 by the nearby North American Refractories Plant, Chatman said most of the Southern migrants who lived there, including his uncle and aunt, were from Salida, South Carolina, and were affiliated with the AME Residents of the community, informally called Shantytown, were from South Boston, Virginia, and connected to the Mt. Hope Baptist Church. When Chatman and Lowell Rogers Sr. were asked to which congregation the African Americans who lived on Ganister Hill belonged, they replied, "Holy and Sanctified and the Methodist

Church.” The former of these was an early name given to the Tabernacle Church of God in Christ which was built in 1928 on Washington Street by individuals who had held tent revivals in order to pay for the church. R. Cummins McNitt said the church building “was condemned in 1972, after it had been damaged by the floods of Hurricane Agnes.”¹³⁰

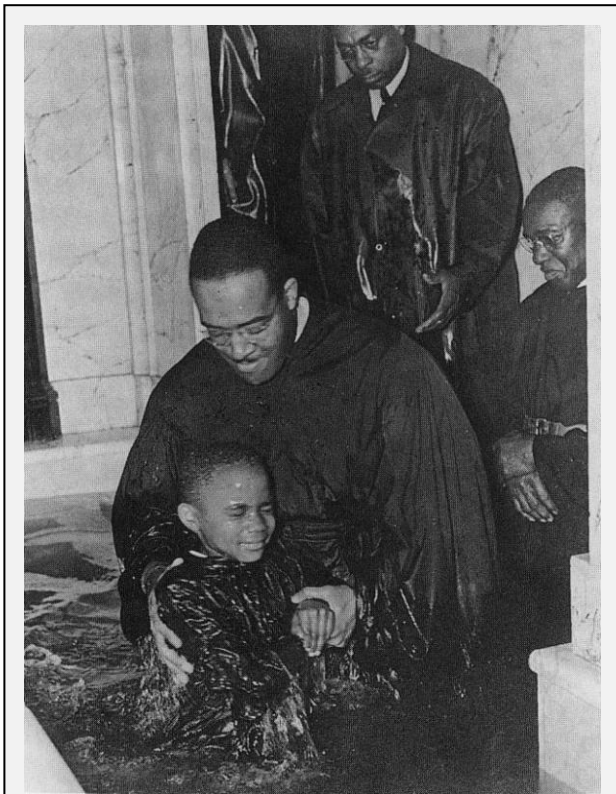
Gladys Fortsen, also of Mount Union, was born in 1923, and during her youth in the 1920s and 1930s she lived on Ganister Hill where, she recounted, African American residents generally worshipped at one of three churches: Bethel AME, Mt. Hope Baptist, and the Tabernacle Church of God in Christ. Responding to a query as to how old the Tabernacle Churches was, she remembered when “they got organized,” adding, “Because at first there was a lady . . . they called her Mother Martin. And they used to have services in a house, and in different peoples’ houses.” She continued her conversation by recollecting that the house in which Mother Martin met was located behind the site on which the first church was built—“on Washington and Walnut,” and that “the little house” was “still standing there.”¹³¹

She confirmed McNitt’s findings that the C.O.G.I. Meetinghouse was constructed in the late 1920s, and that “after the flood it was destroyed.” Fortsen said there was no rivalry among the churches, but instead a camaraderie, as the three “have always been interactive with each other.” Referring to the original Bethel Church, she recalled, “Now, my father helped them build that church. Him and his brother helped to build that church. And at the time, this man was a minister in our church, for about seven years. And we built the house, which was fastened to the church, as a parsonage, for him to live in.” The minister was the Reverend E. J. Jones. Touting his ability as a preacher, she said “And when he was there, our church was—we had plenty of folks.” Fortsen mentioned that every summer, from the 1930’s onward, churches in central Pennsylvania, including Mt. Union, would “come together at Bland’s Park” near Altoona, for “a church picnic.”¹³²

Dorris Kean of Washington, Washington County, mentioned that in 1941 she “was married down on Lincoln Street there at the Nazareth Baptist Church down around the corner.” Although wed there, she was a member of the St. Paul AME Church when it was located “on what they called Wheeling Street, down by the fire station.” Of the churches currently in existence in Washington, all of which date to at least the 1940s, Keane said, “There’s St. Paul and John Wesley. Nazareth Baptist. White’s Memorial AME . . .” She also cited churches in the Canonsburg area, an adjacent coal community that often interacted with Washington. “Then you get to Canonsburg,” she continued, “and there’s a couple in Canonsburg, St. Paul’s AME and Mount Olive Baptist.”¹³³

Ellen Franklin of Bedford, Bedford County, a member of Mt. Pisgah AME Zion Church in the community, called to mind her experiences of traveling to “Sunday School Picnics for the Zion Churches” at Lakemont Amusement Park, in Altoona, along with other church congregations

from the region. “You know, your family would go. You’d pack a picnic lunch and go and then the—your church would provide tickets for—you know, for us kids to ride.” Phyllis Johnson, also of Bedford, remembered that a Reverend Bradley kept Mt. Pisgah Church functioning in the 1970s as the population of African-Americans, which was small, began dwindling. “But Reverend Bradley was very influential doing a lot of things in the community,” she said. “And he kept this church alive, because he pastored this church for many years with no salary. He worked for the [AME Zion] denomination, and he traveled a lot and whatnot. . . . He preached here when he was here. When he wasn’t here, he always saw that somebody did come and take over for him.”¹³⁴



Reverend E. Luther Cunningham of St. Paul’s Baptist Church, 10th and Wallace, performing a baptism, 1940. From the John W Mosley Collection, Courtesy Charles L. Blockson Afro American Collection, Temple University Archives. Used with permission.

Johnson also talked about the changing dynamic of present-day rural African American churches that, like Mt. Pisgah, were losing black members but attracting white congregants. The phenomenon was confusing to her “This is the AME Zion church up on the corner,” Johnson said. “But it cannot be stated that this is the Black church [up on] the corner [anymore]. So things have changed, things are different.” Bernard Chatman, originally from Mt. Union and now living in Lewistown, Mifflin County, where he worships at the AME Church, believed it was representative of the changing times and that individuals had come to accept each other enough that an African American preacher at a black church could preach to a diverse, multiracial congregation.¹³⁵

Gloria and J. D. Watson of Wilkes-Barre discussed the history and current state of the region’s churches. Gloria Watson said “the two prominent black churches” in the community

were “Bethel, and it was an AME Church,” and “Mt Zion, that was the Baptist Church.” Mt. Zion was located on Well Street in the “Iron Triangle,” a predominantly African American neighborhood, and Bethel was located on Washington Street, near the public square. Several individuals joined the group interview at the Watson residence, including Ron Felton, head of the local NAACP, and the Reverend Kenneth Burnett, pastor of Scranton’s AME Bethel Church. Burnett, who lived in Wilkes-Barre and commuted twenty miles to Scranton, offered interesting insight into the AME’s annual state conferences. “We have an annual conference every year, but

every year it [often is held] in Pittsburgh or Erie, and everybody from this side of the state has got to make that drive, pay that high hotel bill, tolls, food along the way. And those people in Pittsburgh very rarely, maybe once in twelve years, they'll come out here. But it's always got to be out there at our expense. And some of us get very tired of it, and, you know, I'd recommend--a hotel in the middle of the state, everybody's got to drive. Everybody.”¹³⁶

Burnett voiced his opinion on the matter of the composition and alignment of the AME districts in Pennsylvania. Scranton is part of the Allegheny District. “We're closer to Philadelphia,” Burnett said. “We should be in their conference, but we're not.”¹³⁷

Church and Labor

There was a strong relationship between the church and labor in Pennsylvania during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The Great Migration of African Americans coming north from the south in search of work, with many settling in the industrial regions, had an immense effect on black churches, as much of the focus and needs of the congregations revolved around the need for work. The impact that the great migrations had on both the churches and the work force cannot be underestimated.

On the employers' side, alliances with black churches were driven by their desire to “develop a dependable and efficient force of employees,” and to this end “industrialists supported churches that espoused the work ethic and preached thrift and sobriety to individual workers.”¹³⁸ Chiefly in western Pennsylvania “employers ... developed a particularly close relationship with black churches.”

On the clergy's side, “black clergymen believed the numerical growth of their congregations resulted from increased employment opportunities in local industries,” and since “they and their churches benefited from industrial philanthropy, few among the black clergy protested against racial discrimination in hiring, promotion, and job assignments.”¹³⁹ Essentially, in the age of lynching, “black ministers and denominational leaders recognized that increased employment prospects for blacks in the Pittsburgh vicinity meant greater opportunities to found new congregations and add to the membership of existing churches,” so they commonly avoided criticizing employers for unfair treatment and instead, preached a strong work ethic to the congregations.”¹⁴⁰

However, by the 1930s after considerable migration to the Pittsburgh area, black clergymen supported organized labor and “openly denounce[d] unfair employment practices against the black worker.”¹⁴¹ The church now became a powerful influence in the search for equality, or at least fairer treatment, for black Pennsylvanians in the workplace.

By 1946 Horace Cayton, a black sociologist and columnist for the Pittsburgh Courier, wrote that “few Negro preachers dared to oppose the United Steelworkers of America and other such unions since it would mean the sure loss of their congregations,” declaring that “the unionization of black workers allowed their ministers to speak out against industry’s discriminatory treatment of black employees and facilitated the occupational advancement of several black steelworker-preachers.”¹⁴²

Notes

³⁸ “Still the chronological coverage, depth, and breadth of such studies are quite thin, even for the premier black cultural institutions—the church—as suggested by C. James Trotman, “we have few studies outside the African Methodist Episcopal denominations.” Joe William Trotter, Jr., *African Americans in Pennsylvania: Shifting Historical Perspectives* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), 26.

³⁹ Sarah L. Barne, “Black Church Culture and Community Action,” *Social Forces*, No 2(December 2005: 972, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3598487> (accessed July 20, 2010).

⁴⁰ Theodore Hershberg, “Free Blacks in Antebellum Philadelphia: A Study of Ex-Slaves, Freeborn, and Socioeconomic Decline,” *African Americans in Pennsylvania: Shifting Historical Perspectives*, University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 26.

⁴¹ Emma Jones Lapsansky, “Since They Got those Separate Churches: Afro-Americans and Racism in Jacksonian Pennsylvania,” in *African Americans in Pennsylvania: Shifting Historical Perspectives*. University Park, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997, 101.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Richard Middleton, *Colonial America: A History, 1565-1776*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1992, 300.

⁴⁵ Middleton, 300.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Henry Cadbury, “Negro Membership in the Society of Friends,” *Journal of Negro History*, 21, no 2(1936): 153. See also Donna McDaniel and Vanessa Julye, *Fit for Freedom, Not for Friendship: Quakers, African-americans, and the Myth of Racial Justice*, (Philadelphia: Quaker Press, 2009).

⁴⁸ C.E. Pierre, “The Work of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts Among the Negroes in the Colonies,” *Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 1, October, 1916, 349, 354-55; Carter G. Woodson, *The History of the Negro Church*, Washington D.C.: Associated Publishers, 192, 11.

⁴⁹ C.E. Pierre, “The Work of the Society”, 355.

⁵⁰ *Pennsylvania Gazette*, August 22, 1745.

⁵¹ Ibid., June 23, 1748; *Pennsylvania Gazette*, October 26, 1749; *Appleton's Cyclopedia of American Biography*, edited by James Grant Wilson, John Fiske and Stanley L. Klos. New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1888, 497.

⁵² *Pennsylvania Gazette*, August 23, 1775.

⁵³ *Pennsylvania Gazette*, November 25th, 1772; *Pennsylvania Gazette*, June 6, 1778.

- ⁵⁴ E. Curtis Alexander, *Richard Allen: The First Exemplar of African-American Education*. New York: ECA Association, 1985, 39; Richard Allen, *The Life Experiences and Gospel Labors of the Rt. Rev. Richard Allen*, Philadelphia: Martin and Boston, 1833, in Milton C. Sernett, ed., *African-American Religious History: A Documentary Witness*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1999, 140-141.
- ⁵⁵ Richard Allen, *The Life Experiences*, in Sernett, *African-American Religious History*, 143-144.
- ⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 144-145.
- ⁵⁷ Free African Society Preamble, in Aptheker, *A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States*, vol. 1, 17-18.
- ⁵⁸ Allen in Sernett, *African-American Religious History*, 145-146.
- ⁵⁹ *Ibid.*
- ⁶⁰ Allen in Sernett, *African-American Religious History*, 150
- ⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 147; See also Nash, *Forging Freedom*, 109-115; Alexander, *Richard Allen*, 22-26.
- ⁶² Herbert Aptheker, "The Negro Church Achieves Independence, 1816" in Aptheker, *A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States*, 66-67; ⁶² *Annals of the First African Church in the United States of America now Styled the African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas, Philadelphia...*, by the Rev. Wm. Douglas, Philadelphia: King & Baird Printers, 1862, 93-95.
- ⁶³ For an excellent overview of the growth and development of Mother Bethel and the early AME church, see Carolyn Stickney Beck's *Our Own Vine and Fig Tree: The Persistence of the Mother Bethel Family*, New York: AMS Press, 1989 and Howard D. Gregg's *History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church*. Nashville: AME Sunday School Union, 1980.
- ⁶⁴ Nash, *Forging Freedom*, 228-230.
- ⁶⁵ Richard Allen, *The Life, Experience, and Gospel Labours of the Rt. Rev. Richard Allen. To Which is Annexed the Rise and Progress of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America. Containing a Narrative of the Yellow Fever in the Year of Our Lord 1793: With an Address to the People of Colour in the United States*, Philadelphia: Martin and Bodenn, 1833, 26-28.
- ⁶⁶ Richard Newman, *Freedom's Prophet: Bishop Richard Allen, The AME Church, and the Black Founding Fathers*. New York: New York University Press, 2008, 162-164.
- ⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 164.
- ⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 164-166.
- ⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 166-168.
- ⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 168-169.
- ⁷¹ *Sermon Delivered in the African Bethel Church in the City of Baltimore on the 21st of January, 1816, to a numerous concourse of people, on account of the Coloured People gaining their Church (Bethel) in the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania, by the Reverend D. Coker, Minister of said Church* in Aptheker, *A Documentary History of the Negro People*, vol. 1, 68-69.
- ⁷² James A. Handy, *Scraps of African Methodist Episcopal History*, Philadelphia, AME Book Concern 1902, 15.
- ⁷³ *Ibid.*
- ⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 47.
- ⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 49-50.

⁷⁷ Daniel A. Payne, *Recollections of Seventy Years*. Nashville: AME Sunday School Union, 1888, 35.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 51, 58.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 61-62.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 64.

⁸¹ Ibid., 72-74.

⁸² Ibid., 111, 158.

⁸³ Ibid., 205, 207-208.

⁸⁴ Thomas Henry, *From Slavery to Salvation: The Autobiography of Rev Thomas W. Henry of the AME Church*. Edited with historical essay by Jean Libby. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1994, 5.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 6-7, 10.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 16.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 17.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 19.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 22, 32-42.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 91.

⁹¹ Ibid., 91; 54-55.

⁹² *AME Christian Recorder*, August 8, 1862, August 30, 1862

⁹³ *AME Christian Recorder*, June 3, 1865; Henry, *From Slavery to Salvation*, 60-61.

⁹⁴ Jarena Lee, *Religious Experiences and Journal of Mrs. Jarena Lee*, Philadelphia: Published for the Author, 1849.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 3-5.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 5.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 11.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 13-14.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 15, 17-18.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 29-32.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 32-34.

¹⁰² Ibid., 41.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 41-42.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 59.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 61.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 81-82.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 82.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 8-9.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 9.

¹¹⁰ Lewis V. Baldwin, *Invisible Strands In African Methodism: A History of the African Union Methodist Protestant and Union American Methodist Episcopal Churches, 1805-1980*. New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 1983, 63.

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- ¹¹¹ Roger Lane, *William Dorsey's Philadelphia & Ours: On the Past and Future of the Black City in America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991, 231-232; Matt Sauer and Neeta Desai. "Spotlight on Mother African Zoar United Methodist Church," in *Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia*, Summer, 1996, Vol. 13, no. 2; Christine McKay, "Inventory of the Zoar United Methodist Church records, 1841-1984," Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, www.nypl.org/research/manuscripts/scm/scmgzoar.xml.
- ¹¹² Matthew Hopper, *From Refuge to Strength: The Rise of the African-American Church in Philadelphia, 1787-1949*, 7; See also Shelton B. Waters, "We Have This Ministry: A History of the First African Presbyterian Church Philadelphia" PA: Gloucester Memorial and Historical Society, 1994.
- ¹¹³ Hopper, *From Refuge to Strength*, 8.
- ¹¹⁴ Juan Williams, *This Far by Faith: Stories From the African-American Religious Experience*. (New York; Harper Collins, 2003): 86-87; See also Sernett, 155; J. W. Hood, *One Hundred Years of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church*, (New York: AME Zion Book Concern, 1895); William J. Walls, *The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church: Reality of the Black Church*, (New York: AME Zion Publishing House, 1974); and www.stjohnamezion.org/AMEZH.html.
- ¹¹⁵ Beth L. Savage and Carol D. Shull, *African-American Historic Places/National Register of Historic Places*. New York: Preservation Press, 1994, 417.
- ¹¹⁶ C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African-American Experience*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1990.48; Harry V. Richardson, *Dark Salvation: The Story of Methodism as it Developed Among Blacks in America* Garden City, NY: Anchor Press, 1976.; Lewis V. Baldwin, *Invisible Strands. Colored American*, "Of the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church in America," October 21, 1837.
- ¹¹⁷ Hopper, *From Refuge to Strength*, 11; E.L. Carey and A. Hart. *Philadelphia in 1830-1, or a Brief Account of various Institutions and Public Objects in the Metropolis Forming a Complete Guide for Strangers and a Useful Compendium for the Inhabitants*. Philadelphia: J. Kay, 1830, 49.
- ¹¹⁸ Du Bois, *Philadelphia Negro*, 200.
- ¹¹⁹ Pittsburgh History and Landmarks Foundation, *A Legacy in Bricks and Mortar: African American Landmarks in Allegheny County*, Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh History and Landmarks Foundation, 1995, 41, 56-57; Glasco, WPA *History of the Negro in Pittsburgh*, 232.
- ¹²⁰ Glasco, WPA *History*, 232; See also Dennis C. Dickerson, "The Black Church in Industrializing Western Pennsylvania," in *Shifting Perspectives*, 389 and *A Legacy in Bricks and Mortar*, 43.
- ¹²¹ Debra Adleman, *Waiting for the Lord: 19th Century Black Communities in Susquehanna County*, Rockport, ME: Picton Press, 2000, Pennsylvania, 70, 73-74; *Independent Republican*, December 22, 1863, January 1, 1864.
- ¹²² Emerson Moss, *African-Americans in the Wyoming Valley, 1770-1990*, Wilkes-Barre: Wyoming Historical and Geological Society and Wilkes University Press, 1992, 51-52.
- ¹²³ *Ibid.*, 59.
- ¹²⁴ For a great investigation of African-Americans coming North from 1890-1940, and bringing along either their Baptist faith or other denominational practices, see Milton C. Sernett's *Bound For the Promised Land: African-American Religion and the Great Migration*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1997.
- ¹²⁵ *1910 Negro Business Directory*, 41, 43, 51.
- ¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 80-84.
- ¹²⁷

¹²⁸ Ibid., 91-92; 118-119.

¹²⁹ Interview with Bernard Chatman, July 10, 2008.

¹³⁰ Interview with Bernard Chatman and Lowell Rogers; R. Cummins McNitt, "The History of the Black Community of Mount Union, PA: Is This a Jim Crow Place?" Master's Thesis, Pennsylvania State University, 1987, 19. Regarding the place of origin for many of the "Shantytown" and Kistler residents who migrated from the South in the 1910's 20's and 30's, Chatman's assertions are also supported by the 1920 and 1930 Federal Census for Mt. Union Borough, Huntingdon County, and Kistler Borough, Huntingdon and Mifflin Counties.

¹³¹ Interview with Gladys Fortsen, July 11, 2008.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Interview with Dorris Keane, September 23, 2008.

¹³⁴ Interviews with Ellen Franklin and Phyllis Johnson, September 2, 2008.

¹³⁵ Interview with Phyllis Johnson, September 2, 2008; Interview with Bernard Chatman, July 10, 2008.

¹³⁶ Interview with J.D. and Gloria Watson, Reverend Kenneth Burnett and Ronald Felton, July 28, 2008.

¹³⁷ Interview with Reverend Kenneth Burnett, July 28, 2008.

¹³⁸ *Shifting Historical Perspectives*, 388.

¹³⁹ *Shifting Historical Perspectives*, 389.

¹⁴⁰ Black Church, 395.

¹⁴¹ *Shifting Historical Perspectives*, pp 388-389.

¹⁴² Black Church, 399.

Chapter 3

African-American Labor in Pennsylvania 1644-1860

Labor emerges as the central material force driving the experiences of African Americans in Pennsylvania. Beginning with slavery and continuing through the Second Great Migration, African American settlement was most often conditioned by labor, both compulsory and optional. Africans were first introduced in the Commonwealth in the mid-17th century as enslaved, desperately needed labor to clear plantations along the Delaware; in the 20th century, their descendents remain a significant and important part of keeping the economy healthy. Settlement patterns of Pennsylvania's African American residents are tightly woven with labor, commerce, and industry, and are derived directly from seeking and finding opportunities for employment. As with all African American endeavors in the Commonwealth, due to white prejudice, discrimination, and bigotry, many employment opportunities either remained unavailable or difficult to find and keep. Thus the search for decent employment merged seamlessly with the ongoing quest for equal citizenship.

From the pre-colonial, colonial, and early republic periods through to the eve of the American Civil War, slaves, indentured servants, and free African Americans toiled on farms and in iron furnaces; were employed as artisans, tradesmen, and manual laborers; or, as was the case with a number of individuals, became successful entrepreneurs who served as trailblazers for later generations of African American businessmen and women. For researchers, the challenge is finding documentation, which is often sparse and fragmented for the early periods and most often yields only indirect information.

Pennsylvania's African American laborers contributed a great deal to the economic vitality of their local communities and to the Commonwealth, mainly to the growth of Pennsylvania's trade and industrial infrastructure. They helped fuel the first and second Industrial Revolutions that ushered in a new era of job prospects both for African Americans born in Pennsylvania and for those who moved north looking for work and escaping the Jim Crow South.

Agricultural Slave Labor

During the colonial era, a scant 10 percent of African American slaves in Pennsylvania worked on farms or as agricultural laborers. The modest number was essentially due to the lack of an intensive cash crop plantation economy, leading to the creation of a system of agriculture chiefly comprised of small farms on which white indentured servants were just as likely to be employed

as were bonded individuals of African descent. When Pennsylvania's slaves were employed as agricultural laborers, they usually did not labor in the same fashion as those who toiled on large plantations in the South. Instead, they helped raise crops such as rye, wheat, and flaxseed; tended to livestock such as cows, hogs, and sheep; and typically plowed the fields along with their white owners.

One of the foremost scholars of slavery during Pennsylvania's colonial era, Darold D. Wax, summarized the distinct nature of Pennsylvania's agricultural-based slave population when he explained, "the farmer did not organize his labor into large work gangs A servant or hired hand worked side by side with his master in the fields." He also noted that many small family units, consisting of "a man, a woman, and children, were generally the norm on a rural Pennsylvania slave-owner's farm," as "it was rare for a Pennsylvania farmer to own more than four Negroes."¹⁴³

Wax's supposition is borne out in a critical surviving document that highlights the history of slavery in Pennsylvania, *The Negro (Slave) Register of Washington County, Pennsylvania, From 1782 to 1851*. This tract is a compendium of slave registrations in the county for more than sixty years. The Commonwealth required these records be kept to ensure that slave owners adhered to the 1780 *Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery*. The listings included the names and ages of slaves, as well as their owners' names and occupations.

In an entry dated October 1, 1782, Nicholas Christ, identified as a "Yeoman" farmer in Fallowfield Township, registered his slaves:

- One man named Joshua, 22 years
- One woman named Easter, aged 21 years
- One girl named Sall, aged 7 ditto
- One boy named Bille, aged 3 ditto

James Ewing of Robinson Township, also a yeoman, enumerated his slaves:

- One man named Bosen, aged 31 years
- One woman Hannah, 45
- one girl Hajor, 10

In a listing for Daniel McFarlin of Bethlehem Township, his slaves appeared as

- One man named Lugen, aged 30 years
- One woman Isabell, aged 30 years
- One boy Pomp, 14
- One girl Phillis, 10
- One boy Ralph, 4
- One girl Laveny,¹⁴⁴

The Negro (Slave) Register of Washington County contains more records, but it is difficult to ascertain the makeup and determine the identities of the family members. Most of these cases, however, share at least one feature in common: the ratio of registered slaves per farm or owner is still relatively small.

The records of slaves owned as “property” by William Henry Noble, a Robinson Township farmer, show that a grandmother, aunt, or other female relative or acquaintance may have lived in a small slave family:

Morisah, age 54

One man named Cain, aged 27 years

One woman Sall, 25

One boy Jack, 8 months

John Swan, Cumberland Township, yeoman, described his slaves as:

Judith a negroe slave, aged 34

Bob, 20 years

Vill, 9 years

Joe, 7 years

Jerry, 2 years

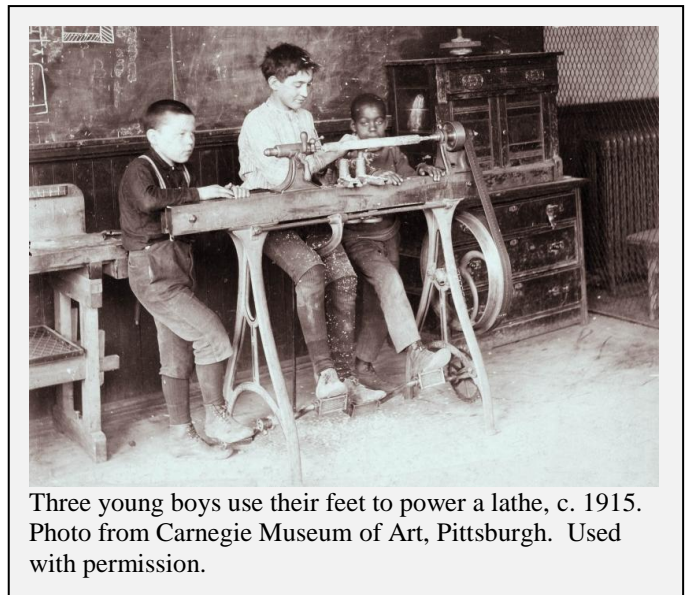
Isaac, 11 months

Prisilla, 11 months ¹⁴⁵

The register contains numerous instances where one or several individuals were listed by owners as workers for their farm. “One negro woman named Luce aged 19 years” worked on the farm of yeoman Benjamin Fry, Fallowfield Township, and a “negro boy named Perod aged 15 years” was owned by Henry Spears.

Other accounts exist in the pages of additional sources as well, including (but not limited to) the abundance of county histories published during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In his 1884 *History of Delaware County, Pennsylvania*, Henry Graham

Ashmead utilized the original Delaware County slave registration rolls as one of his primary sources to better reconstruct the history of slavery in the county. Appearing in his chapter



Three young boys use their feet to power a lathe, c. 1915. Photo from Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh. Used with permission.

entitled “Redemptioners and Slavery in Delaware County” are a number of notable examples of agrarian slave families who were frequently organized in such a way as to prove Wax’s initial hypothesis that small slave families were typically the norm on modestly-sized yeoman farms.

Morton Morton, of Ridley, recorded his slaves, designated “slaves for life,” as

- a negro man, Caesar, 28
- a negro woman, Liz, 30
- a negro boy, Annias, 8 year and 7 months
- a negro boy, Samuel, aged 8 year and 7 months
- a mulatto boy, John, aged 6 year and 4 months
- mulatto boy, Jacob, aged 6 year and 4 months
- a mulatto girl, Sarah, 3 years and 3 months
- a mulatto boy, Peter, 1 year and 10 months¹⁴⁶

(It appears that Caesar and Liz were the parents of two sets of twins, Annias and Samuel and John and Jacob.)

Ashmead cited a number of cases similar to this entry, including one for Isaac Hendrickson, a Ridley farmer, who owned the following “slaves for life”:

- a negro man, Tone, 40;
- a negro woman, Nance, 36;
- a negro boy, Frank, 12;
- a negro girl, Bett, 10;
- a negro boy, Tone, 7;
- a negro boy, Joe, 5;
- a negro girl, Pol, 3; and
- a negro girl, Dine, aged 6 months.”¹⁴⁷

Wax’s theory is verified in the notation for John Morton, a Ridley farmer, who listed among his property (also “slaves for life.”):

- negro man, George, 52
- a negro woman, Dinah, 47
- a negro girl, Hannah, 7
- a female negro child, 1 year old¹⁴⁸

Despite these examples, in which the data analyzed from Washington and Delaware counties confirms Wax’s hypothesis, there exist numerous instances where the converse of his premise was apparent. Large farms existed in Pennsylvania during the 18th century, and owners required a much higher percentage of slave labor to manage their operations.

Washington County's slave register contains information that is revealing. One of the most notable listings is for a farmer, Herbert Wallace, who owned 20 slaves of various ages and both sexes. He was the cousin of William Wallace, a Revolutionary War colonel, and he and his cousin and various family members owned slaves that worked on a large tract of land encompassing the region of "Pigeon, Pike Run and Ten Mile creeks" on which flaxseed was harvested and threshed. Herbert Wallace's slaves were recorded in the Washington County register on December 28, 1782:

Cata a male negroe Slave aged 28 years	Murrear, female 45 years	One farmer and large landholder in Washington County who had registered more than twenty slaves during a thirty-three year period, from 1780 to 1813, was John McDonald. According to John W. Jordan's 1914
Harkless 25 years	Dinah 35 years	
Robert 15 years	Frider 26 years	
James 13 years	Priss 22 years	
Harry 13 years	Bess 11 years	
Tom 9 years	Linn 11 years	
Josiah 7 years	Pegg 5 years	
Peter 5 years	Rose 2 years	
Jack 70 years	Chloe 6 years	
	Luce 1 years	
	Riss 7 years ¹⁴⁹	

Genealogical and Personal History of Beaver County, McDonald settled on Robinson's Run. He "became the possessor of valuable property, wide in extent, cultivated by a large number of slaves, his first home being near the Virginia line," and "much of his original tract of land is still remaining in possession of his descendants. The register identified McDonald's slaves ranging in age from two months 47 years old. At least eight of the slaves were adults at the time of their registration. They were listed as:

Rachel	George	Moniko
Rebecka	Jence	Issac
Milly	Ann	Henry
Bets	Charles	James
Ebbe	Joe	Nelly
Pompey	Jean	Garshom
Hannah	Cain	Menaks ¹⁵⁰
Moriah		

In addition to Wallace's and McDonald's slaves, the *Negro (Slave) Register of Washington County* enumerated a large group of slaves held by Samuel Blackmore, a farmer and Revolutionary War officer who moved to Pennsylvania in 1782. He previously lived in the slave states of Maryland and Virginia. Blackmore was the subject of an extraordinary legal case that made its way to the Pennsylvania Supreme Court. Two of his slaves, Cass and Liddy, fought to

revoke their status of “slave for life” because they believed that they were improperly registered. Aided by the Pennsylvania Abolition Society, they won their case because Blackmore missed a registration deadline. Nevertheless, in 1782, Blackmore registered the slaves on his farm, who became, upon his death in 1787, the property of his wife Abriella, who held them until at least 1797:

Harry, Negroe Slave, age 23
 Clar, Negroe Slave, age 45
 Liddy, Negroe Slave, age 20
 Delela, Negro Slave, age 27
 Lettia, Negroe Slave, age 19
 Cate, Negroe Slave, age 18
 Cass, Negroe Slave, age 22¹⁵¹

There are a number of sources, in addition to the Washington County register, documenting large-scale farming operations that depended on slave labor. Memoirs, biographies, and county histories contain descriptions illustrating that these farms more closely resembled Southern slave plantations than the relatively small, semi-egalitarian undertakings Wax identified as the norm in Pennsylvania. One of the sources, William Watts Hart Davis, author of *The History of Bucks County* (1905), utilized when reconstructing the history of slavery in the county was a memoir of Samuel Hart.



This view of a farm in Chester County was taken by Clara Nelson, n.d. Photo from the Chester County Historical Society. Used with permission.

Hart reflected on his youth spent on his family’s Bucks County farm in 1845. “From fifty to sixty years ago,” he remembered, “I could stand on a corner of my father’s farm, twenty miles from Philadelphia on the Old York road, commanding an extensive view of a country beautifully situated . . . and from that spot I could count

sixteen farm houses, and in every house were slaves more or less.”¹⁵²

Jacob Painter, whose account was similar to Hart’s, in 1870 reconstructed his family’s history and its early Quaker roots in Bucks County’s Middletown Township. In a section entitled “The

Jacob Minshall Homestead,” Painter described his ancestor as a Quaker farmer who had “received from his father a tract of 500 acres of land in Middletown, in 1707,” and created a large plantation which relied on slave labor. “On this tract there was an Indian burying ground where the Minshall family buried their slaves,” Painter wrote, “and where also other colored persons were buried, but it has now gone out of use. Part of these slaves lived in their master’s family, the others had separate cabins on the farm where they reared families, but they were all voluntarily liberated at an early date.”¹⁵³

Morton Montgomery, in his *Historical and Biographical Annals of Berks County, Pennsylvania*, noted that extensive slave quarters on the farmstead of Samuel Jones were extant in 1909, the year his history was published.

Samuel Jones, son of Thomas and grandson of Rev. Thomas, was born on the homestead in Heidelberg township where his father erected a house in 1775. This house is still standing. He was a farmer by occupation, owned a large and valuable tract of land in Heidelberg township, and had slaves. The negro quarters occupied by the slaves on the Heidelberg farm are still standing. Samuel Jones donated the land upon which the eight-cornered building at Sinking Spring, used first as a Baptist meeting house, later as a school house, now as a dwelling—was erected. The original deed of this property is held by the First Baptist Church of Reading.¹⁵⁴

(One of Thomas Jones’s slaves, Dinah Clark, became a member of Reading’s free black community after Jones manumitted his slaves in the 1790s.)

In addition to autobiographies, monographs, and local histories, Pennsylvania’s newspapers help researchers reconstruct the lives of agricultural workers. Advertisements appearing in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* contain an abundance of critical information about slaves’ livelihoods. An announcement in the February 6, 1766, edition of the *Gazette* called for the leasing of 200 acres of land in southeastern Pennsylvania, not far from the Delaware border, along the Christiana Creek. It noted that “also to be lett with the Plantation,” was “a smart Mulattoe Slave, a good farmer,” who “understands the Business well.”

In a sales notice published by the *Gazette* on October 12, 1774, the skills of African American slave farmers, as well as their proficiency in other jobs, was emphasized. The advertisement for the sale of a “slave not yet 20 years of age” in Bucks County described him as “a good farmer and carter.” An announcement appearing on April 21, 1773, declared: “To be SOLD, for no FAULT, A NEGROE MAN, a compleat Farmer, who hath had under his Care a Farm for several Years.”¹⁵⁵

The Philadelphia newspaper frequently advertised female slaves: “A Negroe woman, and a female child, 16 months old,” who “understands country work” and was a “good cook”; and a “Likely healthy strong Negroe” woman, “about 18 years old,” who undertook “all manner of house work, and is used to milking and being among cows,” could “spin flax and wool well,” and was “a good washer.”

An advertisement published in spring 1774 announced the sale of a “young negroe Wench, this Country born, 23 Years of Age, hath had the Smallpox, and Measles,” who in addition to being “very handy” was “brought up on a Farm.” A March 21, 1773, notice for the sale of John Kidds’s Bensalem, Bucks County, plantation of “109 acres and 63 perches, 45 acres of plow land, 15 acres of meadow, the remainder [being] good woodland,” included “a likely Negroe wench, with two children, who understands all sorts of country business.”¹⁵⁶

The lives of Pennsylvania’s agrarian slaves can be further illuminated by examining fugitive slave listings that highlighted the runaway’s indispensability to his (or her) owner due to their proficiency in some aspect of work. An owner pleaded with the public to help locate his missing slave, a “very suitable farmer,” who was “handy to mend anything that breaks, or hoop a tub.”

In October 1764, Jon Gemmil of Carlisle, Cumberland County, expressed dismay that “a Negroe Lad, named Abraham, about 19 Years of Age” had escaped, as he was accomplished in “any Kind of Farming Business,” and was gifted in “Silver Work.” An advertisement dated February 27, 1793, asking for the return of “a NEGROE man, named JOHN BEARD” to Francis Lee, his owner in Haverford Township, Delaware County, noted Beard was “an exceedingly good farmer.”¹⁵⁷

If African Americans comprised 10 percent of the Commonwealth’s enslaved population during the 18th and early 19th centuries, it’s evident that they helped pave the way for family, local, regional and statewide economic growth.

Free and Indentured Black Farming to 1860

In addition to agricultural-based slave labor, many among Pennsylvania’s free black population living in rural and semi-urban areas during the 18th and 19th centuries, whether recently manumitted or looking for employment, worked on farms. In Chester County, by the year 1820, Gary B. Nash and Jean R. Soderlund argued that 92 percent of free African American agricultural workers were employed as “cottagers,” agricultural laborers, or tenant farmers, while the balance of eight percent owned small parcels of land.

The first three of these groups, African American cottagers—whose name was derived from the fact that they lived in small cottages while working on a farm—were essentially indentured servants “bound to the land and sometimes to their former masters.” According to Lucy Simler, most of the contracts and leases they held on their cottages were usually written for a year-long basis, typically beginning in and ending in April. Simler has approximated that up to 5 percent of the 2,280 free African Americans in Chester County’s workforce in 1820 were cottagers, or what she essentially termed “landless workers.” In some cases, recently manumitted cottagers were given renewable, year-long leases to farm a tract of land for their former owners, but they could not normally amass personal wealth or purchase property.¹⁵⁸

Nash and Soderlund recount one story of a family of African American cottagers named Prudence Ford, Jane Salmon, and Cuff King, manumitted about 1770 by Peter and Thomas Worall of Middletown. While the family was able to purchase many items over a nine year period, including “clothing worth about £20, a set of bells for a team, an ax, sickle, gun, and knife,” they were essentially property-less, leaving them in a precarious position if their lease was not renewed. Families such as the Woralls simply skimmed the underclass, which was literally one step away from being relegated to almshouses or even penitentiaries occupied by “vagrants” who could find no work.¹⁵⁹

In addition to working as cottagers, many African Americans in rural Pennsylvania during the 18th and early to mid-19th centuries worked also as agricultural day laborers. While there may have been plenty of work on farms that grew wheat, flax, and rye, or as stable hands and workers tending to horses, cattle, sheep, and hogs, the pay was meager, and living accommodations had to be procured elsewhere, usually in boarding houses. In the most severe cases, men simply built homes—nothing more than crude huts—in places such as the “Barrens” of southern Chester, Lancaster, and York counties. These areas were not well suited for farming because “colonial inhabitants denuded [this area] of forest and rendered [it] almost uninhabitable by wasteful farming practices.”¹⁶⁰

A vivid account of the life of a day laborer appeared in the *Kennett Advance*, published on October 8, 1892. The story recounts the life of Dabbo Ganges, who came to the United States from West Africa in 1808, the year that Thomas Jefferson “formally” ended the slave trade. Ganges was initially an indentured servant required to work for eight years on the farm of Joseph Taylor of West Chester. Once he was released from his indenture in 1816, however, Ganges spent several decades traveling about Chester County, working on farms while “hoeing, raking hay, and bleaching linen.” Eking out a tough existence, he eventually had to find shelter in the Chester County Almshouse in 1837, an outcome common among many of Pennsylvania’s rural poor population, and particularly among African Americans. He died several years later, in 1840.¹⁶¹

John Tillman, a rural day laborer, also worked in Chester County during the mid-19th century. In an 1896 *Biographical Sketch of the Life and Travels of John W. Tillman*, Tillman recounted a tale that appeared eerily similar to the story of Dabbo Ganges and discussed his roaming of the countryside as a young man, seeking out, for more than a decade, various positions in farm work in Chester and Montgomery counties.

However, his life differed from Ganges's in one critical way. He was a fugitive slave who fled from Maryland to Pennsylvania in 1851. Like many individuals who entered the Commonwealth in a similar way through the 1860s, he could only find short-term job opportunities. In one of his more memorable accounts of working as a day laborer, Tillman recounted his work on the farm of Isaac White, who owned the property on which General George Washington and his ragged troops had encamped during the winter of 1777–1778. “The ground was so rough and stony that I had to bear on the plow-beam to keep the point in the ground . . . many old relics were turned out, such as cannon balls, swords, shovels, picks, axes, and many other things,” he remembered.¹⁶²

Individuals identified as tenant farmers enjoyed the most stability in terms of pay, permanence of residence, the ability to grow crops on their leased property, and the potential for eventual purchase of acreage. Even these workers did not typically earn enough money to be able to purchase their own land, though.

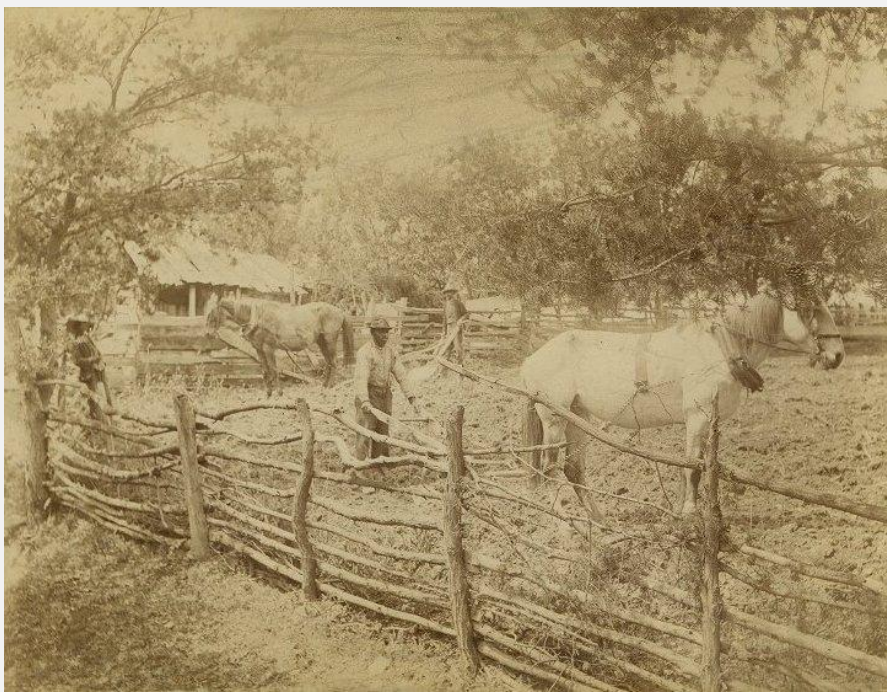


Photo taken by an amateur Pittsburgh photographer, c. 1885. Photo from the University of Pittsburgh. Used with permission.

County, state, and federal census data recorded during the mid-to-late 19th century is helpful in reconstructing the lives, at least on a statistical level, of many African American tenant farmers who lived on, or adjacent to, the property of their landlords. The 1860 census for Delaware County includes examples of this phenomenon. Isaac and Martha Jackson,

ages 33 and 35, were employed as tenant farm laborers on the property of Samuel and Mary Smith. The Jacksons had three children as well. Robert, age 4, Hannah, 3, and Merritt, 11 ½ months. Joseph and Margaret Waters, ages 37 and 33, who had children by the names of Samuel, age 12, Elizabeth, 8, and Susanna, 1, were employed by Daniel and Mary Thatcher on their farm.¹⁶³

Greene County, in southwestern Pennsylvania, counted a large number of African Americans listed in its rolls as “Tenant Farmers,” as evidenced by the 1860 census. William H. Wilson and his wife Charity, ages 36 and 30 respectively, of Centre Township, Greene County, had children named Andrew, age 8, and Lucinda, age 1. The family resided on land owned by Thomas and Nancy Knight. According to the 1888 *History of Greene County*, the Knights owned 212 acres of land they farmed. The census records noted that Joseph Hilton, age 28, with his wife Nancy, and their daughter Hester, and sons Soli and Lewis, lived on the farmstead of John and Nancy Hennon.¹⁶⁴

While little is known about these particular families and their day-to-day lives, in-depth information about several of Pennsylvania’s more prominent African American tenant farmers does exist. Much is known about the life and experiences of tenant farmer Basil Biggs, whose story has been well-documented by a number of scholars and vocational historians. Biggs, who rented his Gettysburg tenant farm from John S. Crawford, fled the area because his home was located near the fields where the battle of Gettysburg was fought on July 1-3, 1863.

When Biggs returned after the battle, he found that his farmhouse had been used as a Confederate field hospital and that “forty-five rebel graves surrounded his house.” Biggs, who claimed damages of more than fifteen hundred dollars for the loss of “45 acres of wheat, eight cows, seven cattle, ten hogs, twenty-six yards of carpet and five dollars worth of jellies,” eventually exhumed the buried bodies surrounding his home and on the battlefield utilizing a two-horse team in which he “hailed six [corpses] at a time.” He dug up more than 3,000 bodies that were then interred at the National Cemetery.¹⁶⁵

Maggie Bluecoat, otherwise known as Margaret Palm, a trusted agent on the Underground Railroad, was as an individual who escaped her own attempted kidnapping by Southern slave hunters. She, her husband Alfred, and their son Joseph lived on the Abraham Brien farm. The Palm homestead was near the Gettysburg battlefield, and when the Palms, along with Brien, returned to their homesteads after the battle, they found a great deal of property damage. According to the National Park Service, Brien filed a claim for “five acres of wheat and two acres of barley, 200 fence boards,” and “a tenant house which had been torn and riddled and almost destroyed by artillery fire.” He also filed a claim for “his own home which was damaged by artillery fire, ransacked by soldiers, and stripped of its siding for use as burial markers for Union soldiers.”¹⁶⁶

Another aspect of this story needs to be taken into consideration because it signals the most significant part of the study concerning the lives and experiences of free African American farmers or farm-workers. Abraham Brien, the owner of the land on which the Palm family resided, was African American, and this fact prompts a pertinent question. If it is known that African Americans could both work on and lease farms in a number of capacities, are there other examples in the historical record of African Americans who, like Brien, were successful farm owners? Yes, there were African American farm owners.

In the 1860 Greene County document listing African American farm laborers and tenant farmers, there appeared a number of black farm owners. Joseph Jones and his wife Hannah, ages 41 and 37, respectively, along with their children, lived on a farm in Jackson Township that was valued at \$3,500 (not to mention Joseph's own personal assets which were appraised at \$3,000). Jacob Wilson and his wife Mary, also of Jackson Township, owned a farm worth one thousand dollars, and Jacob had accumulated five hundred dollars of personal assets. Likewise, an African American farmer, Benjamin Grimage, Center Township, owned a farm worth \$2,500 and held \$1,000 of personal wealth.¹⁶⁷

Across the Commonwealth in Delaware County, the 1860 census records the existence of many African American farm owners, such as Phineas Hyselman, who, with his brother George and his family, owned a farm in Radnor Township worth a staggering \$12,500. In Lower Chichester Township, Giles P. Scott, his wife Caroline, daughters Sarah, Edith, and Ellen, and son Andrew, owned a farm worth \$2,800.¹⁶⁸

Ownership of farms by black Pennsylvanians during the 19th century only illustrates the tip of the iceberg, for there also exists at least one intriguing example in which an entire black farming community thrived during this period. Hinsonville, a settlement in southern Chester County, ceased to exist by the late 1860s and disappeared from county maps by 1873, even though it had flourished for more than thirty years, peaking in 1860 with more than eighty African American families owning land and up to ten of them owning 266 acres of farmland.

Hinsonville was named for Emory Hinson of Maryland, the "community's first black landowner and resident" who purchased his farm of eighteen acres for two hundred and fifty dollars in 1830 from John Leeke, "a white Quaker farmer and landowner," who "was willing to sell some of his land to blacks and have them as neighbors." The village began to see many other farmers appear within its bounds over the next several years, including the families of Edward and George Walls, Samuel, James and Thomas Amos, and Samuel Glasgow.¹⁶⁹

By the 1840s, these families had become the force behind the founding and rise of the Hosana Church, which went through practically every possible independent black church affiliation

through the 1880s—AME, AME Zion , AUMP, UAME—and they, along with other African American Hinsonville residents, typically supported one another in business, cultural, and social endeavors.¹⁷⁰ “While the Hinsonville family members did not build their houses in a cluster in the center of a tract,” Marianne and Paul Russo explained, “as was the custom in many West African nations, the closeness of their homes and the intertwining of their lives reflect the interdependence they experience over the years.” On the farms, the crops grown with the most consistency ranged from “wheat and Indian corn,” to “clover, hay, sweet potatoes and oats.” Owning livestock and hogs was common “at least for farms of ten acres or more.”¹⁷¹

The Russos believed Hinsonville vanished for three reasons: railroads eventually ran through the region, bringing in more European immigrants who displaced African American farmers and laborers in the hunt for employment opportunities; the Ashmun Institute (renamed Lincoln University) bought up many of the surrounding properties and farms owned by blacks for its own expansion (an ironic development considering the school was the nation’s first degree-granting black university); and because the African American Northern farm movement of the mid-19th century essentially failed.¹⁷²

Primary sources prove that the movement promoting farm ownership affected Pennsylvania. Organizers conducted an African American county convention in Allegheny City in August 1843 to address the idea of black farming. Frustrated with the steady decline in available jobs for the community’s African American residents, the organizers lamented they were “being shut out from the boating business,” and decried the fact that “work is scarce in town.” They argued that a viable alternative to their misfortunes might lie in agricultural pursuits, and proclaimed, “Let all who are friendly to farming, or are desirous of becoming farmers, leave their names with L. Woodson, corner of Liberty and Seventh Sts.”¹⁷³ Their objectives were never fulfilled, however. Occurrences such as the “New York Experiment,” in which abolitionist Gerit Smith’s arrangement to dole out nearly 150,000 acres of his own land in upstate New York to create an African American farming community, had failed. Even Frederick Douglass had, by 1853, believed “colored people will congregate in the large towns and cities; and they will endure any amount of hardship and privation, rather to separate and go into the country.”¹⁷⁴

Most of the regions possessing the greatest density of farmsteads owned by blacks were in Pennsylvania’s southwestern, south central, and southeastern farming corridor. There were several notable exceptions, such as the Prince Perkins-Dennis family farm, which had flourished for more than a century in Luzerne County, and the Joseph Green farm, listed in the 1850 Clearfield County census as one of several black-owned farms in the county.¹⁷⁵

Essentially, the reasons that African American farming never spread as a viable enterprise in these other areas (as well as ending suddenly in locales where they had once flourished) ranged from a phenomenon similar to that which led to Hinsonville’s decline to the fact that these areas were often much more remote and geographically isolated, at least during the first half of the 19th

century. It also illustrates the outcome of the collision between economics and racism, as the resistance to African Americans owning land remained strong not only during this era, but also throughout much of the Commonwealth's and the nation's history.

Slave Labor in Pennsylvania's Iron Furnaces

During the 18th century, African American slaves and indentured servants were employed extensively as laborers on large iron plantations that dotted the Commonwealth's landscape. These operations were located in relatively close proximity to at least three essential properties: forests, for the lumber that was cut, chopped, and piled into large stone kilns to create charcoal (the fuel source needed to heat the iron ore mixture to a temperature sufficient enough and with clean enough results so as not to produce impurities); iron ore and limestone deposits, which were mined and utilized as the essential ingredients necessary in the production of pig iron and, later, malleable iron; and streams or creeks which were harnessed as power sources to operate blast furnaces, hammers, and related machinery.

In the early to mid-18th century, owners and operators of iron furnaces realized that workers willing to be employed in this profession were scarce because of its incredibly labor intensive, difficult, and often dangerous nature. They petitioned the state legislature in 1727 to remove the duty on the importation of African slaves into the colony so they could employ them. The petitioners argued that the wages they paid to "free" workers created "a great discouragement and hindrance" to the industry's expansion. They believed slave labor was cheaper and more efficient. While this request appears to have been unsuccessful at first, it was endorsed two years later. In 1729, the duty on importing African slaves into the colony was officially dropped from £5 to £2.26, an outcome widely believed to have been "a concession to the industrialists."¹⁷⁶

Michael V. Kennedy, in his 1996 dissertation entitled "Furnace to Farm: Capital, Labor, and Markets in Pennsylvania's Iron Industry, 1716-1789," wrote that approximately half of the ironworkers in Pennsylvania during the period from 1725 to 1750 were slaves of African descent. Historian Joseph E. Walker determined individuals listed as ironmasters in the 1790 "census report and public records for the charcoal iron producing counties of Berks, Chester, Montgomery, Lancaster, Dauphin and York" were "the largest holders of slaves in . . . districts where ironworks were operated."

A travel account of Swedish adventurer Israel Acrelius, who documented the "Settlements on the River Delaware" in 1759, contains a description of the daily operations of an ironworks which he had visited. "The unskilled laborers are generally composed partly of Negroes [slaves]" and "partly of servants from Germany or Ireland bought for a term of years," he wrote. Many of these individuals were involved in the felling, hewing, processing, and firing of immense

amounts of timber necessary for making the charcoal. Some labored as miners, draymen, and teamsters, all of whom had mined and hauled the iron ore or wood to various locations such as the forge, the furnace, or as a finished product to outlying markets.

Regardless of the way these individuals were obtained for forced labor, many of them were possibly skilled in the art of iron making. The *Journal of the British Iron and Steel Institute* noted in 1872 that “it appears that the negro tribes in the interior of Africa, some 800 miles from Natal, are extremely expert in the manufacture of wrought iron which they smelt in little clay furnaces.”¹⁷⁷ Despite the fact that outside observers such as Acrelius had seen slaves of African descent working as laborers in unskilled professions, there were numerous accounts demonstrating their proficiency in the skilled job areas of the ironworks as well. Scholar Arthur Bining, for example, declared that while only a “few skilled Negro workers were found at the blast furnaces,” there were in fact many others “who were employed at the forges” such as “Green Lane, Durham, Martic, Pine, New Pine, Mount Joy (Valley), Charming, Pottsgrove, and others.” Bining contended that many of these individuals even “performed the skilled tasks of refining and drawing iron into bars,” an occupation that was typically the highest skilled job available at an ironworks.¹⁷⁸

In reconstructing the lives of these individuals, researchers employ primary source materials, such as wills and slave registration rolls that list names, ages and, sometimes, worth. In his 1763 will, William Bird, the founder and operator of Birdsborough Forge in Berks County, under the heading entitled “Negroes, etc.,” identified his slaves who worked at the forge, including:

Maria—Wench—42 years old,” worth £40
 Abigail, Mulatto—22 years old,” worth £40
 Dick—about 3½ years old, ” worth £25, who must “Serve 14 years,”
 (implying that he was an indentured servant and not a slave)
 Tom and Casper, each 19 years of age and valued at £120
 two men named Tony and York, ages 26 and 65 respectively, both worth
 £120
 a slave listed as Ebo, “subject to fits,” worth £35.¹⁷⁹

After the passage of the 1780 *Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery*, slave registration records list slaves who worked at other iron foundries and as agricultural workers. Lancaster County’s 1780 slave registration rolls enumerate the slaves owned by brothers Peter and Curtis Grubb who, with their father, founded and operated the Cornwall Iron Furnace. Their slaves included a number of children and adults, both male and female, who had been designated “slaves for life.” They included Abe, age 5, Austin, 8, Beck, a “Negro woman,” 27, Bob, 24, and Cato, 30, registered to Curtis Grubb, and Abel, 24 or 25, listed as a “runaway,” registered to his brother Peter.¹⁸⁰

Similar examples of slaves registered to ironmasters are found in sources such as tax rolls. For example, Robert Coleman, in the 1800 and 1807 Pennsylvania State and County Tax Lists, owned seven slaves. An ironmaster, Coleman purchased Cornwall Furnace from the Grubb brothers in 1786, and supported the idea of slaves working at the furnace until at least 1807. Under the heading of “Slaves at Cornwall” in the 1807 tax rolls are slaves named Cato, Dick, and Tony.¹⁸¹

To better understand the stories behind the names, however, and not simply rely heavily on statistical information, numerous examples illustrate a more complete picture of their lives. One detailed case, for instance, is found in the records of the estate of William Branson, an ironmaster and proprietor of the Windsor Forge in Lancaster County. The story involves a group of slaves who, in 1750, were offered a large sum of money and, possibly, the manumission of one of their sons if they completed a specific set of tasks.

Branson made a pact with a slave he owned named Adam, assuring him that if he, along with his companions Yellow Boson, Black Boson, and Arche, successfully produced one hundred tons of anchovies in one year, he would then be given £39 and his compatriots would be duly compensated. (Anchovies were the end result of the skilled laborer’s arduous task of hammering malleable iron into a bar weighing between 80 and 150 pounds.) Branson also proposed to Adam that if he taught “Two of our Negroes to be Complete Workmen at the fire, that is to Say from the putting up their fires to the making good and sound Merchantable Ankoneys,” he and the other owners of the forge would free Adam’s son, Solomon. Whether Solomon was actually ever set free or not is not known, although scholar John Bezis-Selfa doubts this was the case.¹⁸²

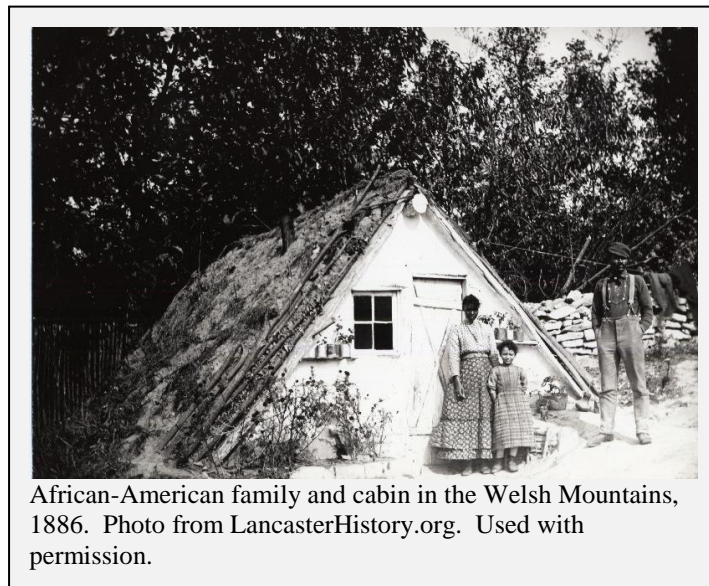
Another way to attain a more comprehensive picture of the lives and working experiences of Pennsylvania’s enslaved iron workers is by reviewing advertisements placed in newspapers, such as the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, calling for the sale or capture of slaves. In one particularly fascinating case, a notice offers a vivid glimpse into the life of a skilled iron furnace worker, a slave of African descent, confirming that such individuals were highly sought after. On April 16, 1767, there was “to be sold by public Vendue in the vicinity of Chester County a likely Negroe Man, that understands Fineing and Drawing of Bar Iron in a Forge, and has been ten Years in the Business.” A related and equally telling advertisement appeared on July 27, 1769.

TO BE HIRED A STOUT hearty NEGROE MAN, named Dick, that has been brought up in a forge making bar iron, and has always been used to work at a finery, is an extraordinary workman, and can be recommended by Messieurs Morris, Shreltee, and Company, at whose forge he has worked several years past, and from whose service he is discharged only on account of their declining work in their forge.

Just which “Messieurs Morris” and “Shreltee” (probably a mistake) to which the advertisement refers is uncertain, but information on Anthony Morris is contained in *Forges and Furnaces in the Province of Pennsylvania* (1914). The book identifies him as “part owner of Colebrook Furnace in Berks County, one of the fourteen founders of Durham Furnace, Bucks County, also a shareholder in Poole and other forges.” Dick could have acquired his experience at any one of a number of furnaces.¹⁸³

An advertisement for the capture of a fugitive slave was published by the *Pennsylvania Gazette* in the 1760s: a “Negroe Man named Sam” ran away from the “Cornwall (alias Grubb’s Iron-Works),” with the “great Probability . . . to make for Philadelphia, as he was bought there last Summer.” In November 1763, a slave named Joe who worked at the Charming Forge in Tulpehocken Township, Berks County, ran away to “join the Indians beyond the Mountain.” Joe “had on when he went away an old Castor Hat, Bearskin Jacket . . . Check Shirt, Cotton Stockings, and new Shoes,” and set off with “a Gun, Tomahawk, and a Pair of Boots.” In a 1770 advertisement, a slave “called Wetheridge, but generally calls himself Jacob,” fled the Pine Forge Furnace in Berks County wearing “a snuff-coloured broadcloth coat, almost new, with yellow metal buttons, a coarse brown great coat, with white metal buttons,” and “good strong shoes.” It was probable, the advertisement continued, that Jacob “took with him a very old silver watch, without a crystal, silver faced, the hour and minute hands both brass.”¹⁸⁴

What is even more compelling than these stories are the notices which ran in the *Gazette* concerning the repeated escape attempts of a number of slaves, although these individuals were usually caught at some point and confined in the County “gaol” (or prison). A slave named Dublin who was “aged 24 Years,” and stood “5 Feet 6 Inches high,” first escaped from the Berkshire Furnace in Berks County on June 26, 1766, wearing “an Ozenbrigs



African-American family and cabin in the Welsh Mountains, 1886. Photo from LancasterHistory.org. Used with permission.

Shirt and Trowsers, green Jacket, a half worn Felt Hat, and new Shoes.” Dublin reappeared as a runaway in the April 13, 1769, edition, “26 years of age” and wearing similar clothes, but with the further description by his owner that he was “a remarkably strong chunky fellow.” He was eventually captured; one month after the first advertisement appeared, it was announced, “NOW in Custody of the Subscriber, a NEGROE Man, named Dublin, who says he belongs to Mr. John

Patton, at Berkshire Furnace, in berks County His master is desired to come, pay Charges, and take him away.”

The saga of a slave whose escape attempts became legendary concludes with his running off to fight for the British during the American Revolution in 1776. Cuff Dix worked at the Birdsboro Iron Forge for Mark Bird and was “a Hammerman by trade,” when in spring 1775 he fled wearing “an old felt hat” and an “iron collar round his neck” (although the advertisement continued “it is likely he will soon get that off”). Bird said Dix was “a smart well set fellow” who “speaks good English,” and was clever enough to “always change his name.” Cuff’s importance to the operations of the ironworks was apparently critical; in October 1775, Bird submitted another listing for his escaped slave, increasing the reward from forty shillings to “THREE POUNDS.” Whether this added incentive for Dix’s capture has not been proven, but two months after Bird’s second advertisement appeared, the newspaper published a notice stating that a “Negroe man” who “calls himself Cuff Dicks, and says he belongs to Mark Bird” was incarcerated at the Chester County Gaol, under the custody of a “Joel Willis, Gaoler.” But Cuff Dix fled for at least a second time on July 17, 1776, an incident that apparently created a stir.

Mark Bird mentioned that Dix’s departure was a setback for his operations. He described Dix as “an active well made fellow” who was “an excellent hammerman” had “often run away, changed his name, denied that the subscriber was his master, and had been confined in several gaols in this province.” He also commented about his ability to pass as a free individual of African descent, as “he was employed the greatest part of last summer by a person near Dilworth’s town, in Chester County.” Bird’s greatest worry hinged on Dix’s next move—one that was apparently toward enemy lines—as many of Pennsylvania’s slaves and free blacks supported the British cause in the Revolutionary War. They sided with the British because of, among other reasons, Lord Dunmore’s proclamation of freedom for slaves who fought for the British or better civil rights for those who were already free. “As Negroes in general think that Lord Dunmore is contending for their liberty,” Bird decreed, “it is not improbable that said Negro is on his march to join his Lordship’s own black regiment, but it is hoped he will be prevented by some honest Whig from effecting it.”

Bezis-Selfa wrote “whatever happened to Cuff Dix, he at least got away from Bird. In 1780 he registered eighteen slaves. Cuff Dix was not among them.” However, Bezis-Selfa was not entirely correct. Even though Dix did not appear on the registration lists at Birdsboro in 1780, he appeared in the March 12, 1777, edition of the *Gazette*. On that date the newspaper ran what was perhaps to be the last notice mentioning the fugitive:

NOW in the Goal of New Castle on Delaware, a certain NEGROE
Man, named CUFF DICKS , the Property of Colonel MARK

BIRD, of Birdsberry, Berks County, Pennsylvania, who is requested to come, pay charges, and take him away.¹⁸⁵

Indentured Servants, Apprenticeships, and Free Labor on Iron Plantations

In addition to slave labor, indentured servitude, apprenticeships and free labor were also utilized on a large-scale in Pennsylvania's many ironworks. There exists an example of indenture, a condition much more likely to have been placed on whites who had worked at such locales, in 1813 in western Pennsylvania. Records contain proof that ironmaster George Anhsutz, an Alsatian immigrant who became one of the Pittsburgh area's first iron furnace founders (he created his furnace on a stretch known as "two-mile run" in the Shady Side section in 1792) had purchased a young man for a period of six years to work at his newly established Huntingdon Furnace in Huntingdon County. It is not known for certain whether the individual was a slave or an indentured servant at the time of the purchase, but he was nevertheless sold to Anshutz for a clearly specified period of indenture. "For the sum of two-hundred and fifty dollars to me in hand paid by George Anshutz," the contract reads, "I do hereby sell and transfer my black Boy Bob . . . for six years from the first day of January, eighteen hundred and thirteen at the expiration of which time the said Bob is hereby declared to be a free man."

A document in the Grubb manuscript records held by the Historical Society of Pennsylvania shows that on September 23, 1798, one of the site's ironmasters, John Jones, "took Negro Jack into the forge to learn him the trade of half-bloomer To work nine months without pay and then three years at 10/ per ton."¹⁸⁶ In addition to indenture, children were apprenticed to ironmasters, although in some cases their contracts seemed more like indentured servitude than apprentice work. An orphaned child, John Peters, although "born free," was sold in 1805 at the age of seven to Reuben Moore, a chimney sweeper in Philadelphia for a period of fourteen years of indenture. Moore eventually transferred Peters to Matthew Brooke, an ironmaster at Birdsborough Forge, where the young man served out the outstanding seven years of his contract.

The preeminent scholar on African Americans in Pennsylvania's iron furnaces, Joseph E. Walker, believed free African American parents often apprenticed their children to ironmasters, intending them to become skilled in various trades on an iron plantation. At Hopewell Furnace, a contract in 1830 between a free African American woman, Sarah Johnston, and the part-owner and manager of the furnace, Clement Brooke, shows that Johnston signed over her son David to Brooke for a period of sixteen years. In one particular clause of the contract that stands out from the rest, David was forbidden from "haunting ale-houses, Taverns; or Playhouses," although he was promised "one years schooling."¹⁸⁷ For free blacks who worked at iron furnaces during the late 18th and early to mid-19th centuries, there were two types of working conditions: transient and permanent. Transient laborers worked on a sporadic basis and received relatively little

compensation while typically living outside of the grounds of the furnace or forge. The scholar Carl D. Oblinger described their experiences quite distinctly. He wrote,

In the 19th century many of this class of black labor . . . became increasingly mobile, sometimes moving to new jobs as often as six or seven times a year; they found themselves more often employed in the unskilled sectors of the charcoal iron industry rather than the skilled . . . and most importantly they began to shun the exigencies of a settled married life, drawing strength instead from their irregular contact with fellow transients.¹⁸⁸



Woman living in a migrant labor camp in Chester County. Photo from the Pennsylvania State Archives, RG11. Used with permission.

An account in Hopewell Furnace's numerous logbooks records that 33-year-old John Thomas, during his three-month stint at the operation in 1823, worked full days and a good amount of half-days; he vanished completely from the record books by mid-December of that year, however. An African American teamster, Frank Paul, who "drove a team in Birdsboro [Furnace] for eight dollars for one month" in September 1819 never appeared again in the furnace's documents after that date. Oblinger described transient work as being primarily a man's job, but women's work at iron furnaces could be impermanent as well. Financial records of the ironworks at Hopewell contain the names of individuals, such as Black Dine who, in the year 1809, "came on June 22, 1803, and on July 14 went away after collecting her wages as made 3 weeks and 2 days @ 6/ per

week," and Black Luce who had "served as a maid for ten weeks."¹⁸⁹

To illustrate the second category of free black labor on iron furnaces, permanency, historians need only to consider the well-documented story of African Americans living on or near the grounds of Hopewell Furnace to discover the complexities of such a working experience. The

men and women who worked at Hopewell undertook a variety of occupations and labored more consistently than their transitory counterparts, allowing them to retain a level of economic stability. In the case of Hopewell, it is even possible to define this community (along with its neighboring Joanna Furnace and Birdsboro Furnace communities) as an intentional community because it evolved into a center of religious, social, cultural, and educational activity. This phenomenon was relatively brief and only some of its institutions were black-owned or operated.

Hopewell Furnace (or Village as it is often called) is situated in Berks County, on the edge of Lancaster and Chester counties, and between the Schuylkill River and the French Creek. Adjacent to the Joanna and Birdsboro Furnaces, the site attracted a number of free African American laborers from the early to the mid-19th century. Historian Wayne Homan contended that many among the African American population who worked at all three sites were escaped slaves who felt secure enough to settle in the area and “earned their living as charcoal burners.”¹⁹⁰ A number of African American teamsters worked at Hopewell Furnace, including William Jacobs, an employee for sixty years; Edward Ford, who carted products “to and from Philadelphia” in 1816; and Moses Morton, a teamster and a laborer from 1829 to 1832. The furnace records contain a contract between Wilkinson Hill, a “Negro Laborer” who worked at the furnace between 1827 and 1846, and John Care, for Hill to build a chimney on Care’s premises and pay his landlord twelve dollars yearly for rent. There are references in Hopewell’s many logbooks to African Americans Joseph Tolbert, Henry and Peter Jones, and Draper Nixon, all of whom were employed as woodcutters in the first stage of the production of charcoal.¹⁹¹

African American women also worked at Hopewell, evidenced by the 1850 and 1860 censuses listing the “Residents at the Ironmaster’s Mansion,” which contain the names and ages of many of these individuals. The 1850 census recorded “Eliza Hill, 33, Negro”; “Sarah Bendigo, 28, Mulatto”; “Susanna Bendigo, 5, Mulatto”; “Anna Maria Wilson, 23, Negro”; “and Anna Keller, 22 Negro.” The 1860 census, however, lists only “Letitia Watson, 15, Negro,” and “Ellen Dickerson, 14 Mulatto.” The diminished numbers were most likely due to the waning of the furnace as a viable business and the changing nature of African American job possibilities at such facilities. Many women who resided on or near the grounds of the furnace worked



Workmen removing the trolley tracks from Second Street. From Dauphin County Historical Society. Used with permission.

for their own families, a suggestion that is made in part from analyzing company store records that show individuals such as “Moses Morten, Negro Laborer-Teamster,” purchasing goods for both himself and his “family of six,” which included his wife and four children.¹⁹²

A cursory review of purchases made by African American laborers who shopped regularly at Hopewell’s company store provides insight about their way of life. Inventories of several of the workers who shopped at the store between 1831 and 1833 reveal they purchased a number of distinctive items. Moses Morten purchased, among other items:

ten pounds of feed and one and one-half bushels of wheat;
twenty yards of calico;
two pairs of shoes and one pair of stockings;
eight and three-quarters pounds of bacon;
one and one-half pounds of cheese;
five and one half pounds of coffee and twenty-six quarts of molasses;
two combs, one razor, one strop and box, and one shaving brush;
four and a half pounds of soap; and
eighteen tobacco rolls.

Wilkinson Hill, like Morten, procured items for his own horse and livestock, as well as his family.

He purchased nine bushels of corn, feed, oats, and wheat in bulk, and two handkerchiefs, one cotton hat, and a pair of “buckskin mitts.” During a two-year period, Hill purchased:

forty-five and three-quarters pounds of bacon;
sixteen and a half pounds of beef;
eighteen pounds of coffee;
fifty-two pounds of sugar;
nearly three pecks of salt; and one-quarter pound of spices and pepper.
nine and one-half pounds of soap and
four papers of tobacco.¹⁹³

There was a powerful external force that anchored the African American community living in and adjacent to Hopewell Village, as well as those who lived in or around the neighboring communities of Joanna and Birdsboro Furnaces: the AME Mt. Frisby Church. Founded in 1856, and known as the Six Penny Colored Church because it was located in the valley of Six Penny Creek, the church counted among its first members escaped slaves who eventually resided in the region because they were given shelter and work in the region’s furnaces. Built on land “purchased from the Cole family,” at least nine African American families lived adjacent to its grounds in 1860. Attendance eventually waned, and the church as an institution completely ceased to operate by the late 1880s.

In addition to religion, education in the furnace's "subscription school" was sporadically available to African American children. During the 1840–1841 school year, at least four of the twenty-one students were Black. Benjamin Hill was "educated in the Village school at furnace expense from 1830 to 1834" while working as an apprentice hostler for Clement Brooke.¹⁹⁴

Regardless of any semblance of social equality that appeared to have existed in the workforce for at least a brief period at Hopewell, opportunities for African American employment at the furnace (and at many of Pennsylvania's furnaces and forges) began to dramatically diminish by the 1850s. The reason was twofold: many of these industries became obsolete by the mid- to late 19th century as the discovery of anthracite and bituminous coal offered newer and better properties to mine and utilize for the production of iron and its counterpart, steel; and the ugly head of racism once again became a factor, as the stigma of race and the competition for jobs among Irish and German immigrant labor and African American laborers extinguished opportunities or, at the least, relegated the industry's remaining black workers to only the unskilled and the most dangerous jobs.

Bezis-Selfa aptly stated, "the declining fortunes of black ironworkers owed partly to employers' attitudes," and partly to the mindset of white laborers who frequently "targeted black colleagues and their families for abuse or worse." Either way, however, the job market changed by the mid-19th century, and what had once seemed to be a haven for escaped slaves and African Americans who were native-born Pennsylvanians essentially ended and a new phase in rural or semi-urban employment opportunities arose.¹⁹⁵

Other Laboring Opportunities for African American Slaves in Pennsylvania Before 1860

Gary B. Nash and Jean R. Soderland wrote:

The work slaves did varied from Philadelphia to the countryside, but because many slaves in both city and hinterland performed domestic service (women more often than men) and practiced trades (men much more often than women), and because owners frequently sold or transferred bondspeople from one place to another, no sharp distinctions can be made.¹⁹⁶

One way to comprehend this broad diversity of the working experience for slaves in the countryside and in urban areas is to return to the abundance of "to be sold" and "runaway" advertisements in Pennsylvania's newspapers of the 18th century. These notices contain mention of a variety of skills undertaken by such individuals, which can further distinguish between jobs for men and women. After studying bonded women's occupations, Soderlund concluded "the evidence on the kinds of work black women performed suggests that most did domestic labor,"

which is reiterated by newspaper advertisements mentioning seamstresses, weavers, spinners servants, washerwomen, laundresses, and cooks.¹⁹⁷

On July 9, 1730, an advertisement was published for the sale of an African American woman who “can Wash and Iron very well, and do House work.” A notice in December 1740 advertised a woman who “can Wash or Iron, or do any kind of household work, and is fit for either Town or Country.” Often added to these responsibilities was the task of cooking.¹⁹⁸ Advertisements, such as one published on October 4, 1744, heralded the sale of “a Very Likely Negro Woman” who, besides being able to “do all Sorts of housework, as Washing Ironing,” was also “a very good Cook.” In a sales notice published on July 19, 1739 it was announced that: “To be SOLD by JOHN INGLIS, A Likely young Negro Woman , who can Wash, Iron, and cook well; also a young Negro Girl, about 14 Years of Age, both has had the small pox.”¹⁹⁹ There also appeared advertisements for the sale of women skilled as weavers and seamstresses as well as a “Negro Woman and Negro Girl, who can work well at the Needle, or any Household Work,” both of whom were to be sold at “Mrs. Stapleford’s in Second Street.” The *Gazette* published an advertisement on November 22, 1753: “To be SOLD , A Likely Negroe woman, with her child, about two months old; is a sensible, clean, neat Negro , and understands all sorts of house business, and is a very good seamster.”²⁰⁰

Advertisements comprise virtually the entire sphere of women’s work, such as the notice published on May 10, 1733, (which highlighted the callousness of slavery with the possibility of breaking up a family):

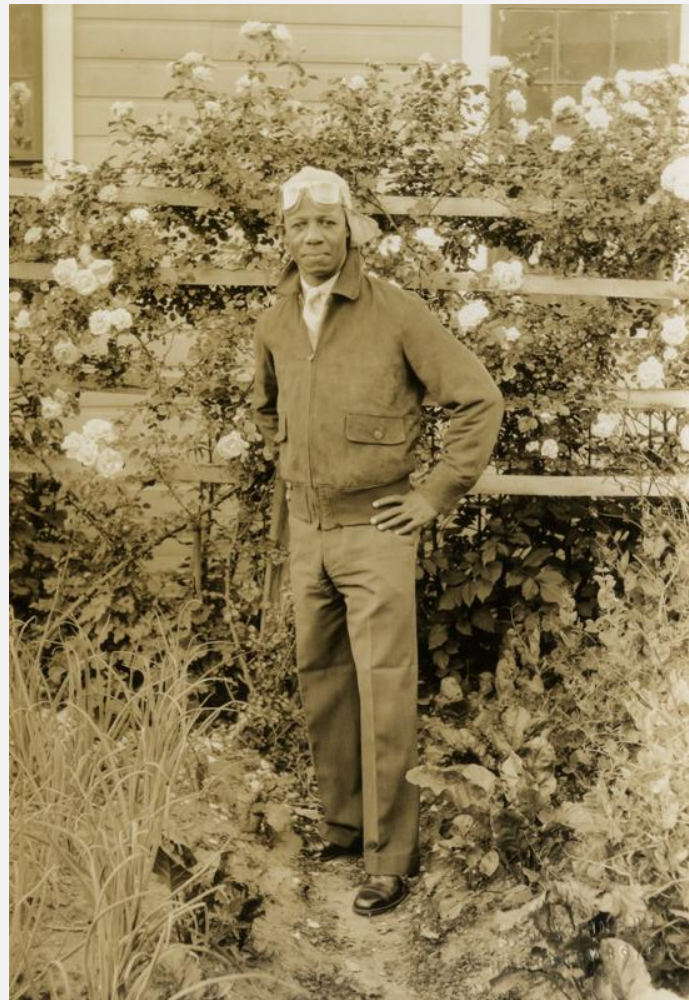
THERE is to be sold a very likely Negro Woman aged about Thirty Years who has lived in this City, from her Childhood, and can wash and iron very well, cook Victuals, sew, spin on the Linen Wheel, milk Cows, and do all Sorts of House work very well. She has a Boy of about Two Years old, which is to go with her. The Price as reasonable as you can agree. And also another very likely Boy aged about Six Years, who is Son of the above said Woman. He will be sold with his Mother, or by himself, as the Buyer pleases.²⁰¹

Scrutinizing advertisements detailing the escape of female slaves in Pennsylvania—together with pleas from their masters for their immediate capture and return—sheds light on the importance of the work that enslaved African American women performed. One of the more intriguing examples of a fugitive’s flight from slavery involved Elizabeth Gregory, the servant of legislator, several-term mayor, and successful Philadelphia businessman, Thomas Lawrence. Because Lawrence led one of the city’s most successful mercantile firms that conducted vigorous business in the slave trade and slave sales, Shippen and Lawrence, it is not surprising to learn he

was extremely reliant on slave labor, and his appeal for Gregory's return clearly shows that he and his family had grown dependent on her. Lawrence placed an announcement in the *Gazette* on October 26, 1749 calling for Gregory's immediate capture and return as she was "a good laundress, and handles her needle well."²⁰²

Turning next to the work of Pennsylvania's enslaved African American males, which took place in arenas other than iron furnaces and forges or farms, researchers identified a diversity of labor that included a wide variety of skilled and unskilled occupations in rural and urban settings. Fugitive slave advertisements offer vivid depictions of these occupations, which included blacksmiths (who worked not only in forges but also independently in rural areas as well as in cities), tanners and hostlers (who labored on farms but also did so in and adjacent to a city's limits), coopers, carpenters, cabinet makers, sail-makers, shoemakers, brick-makers, distillers, cooks, stonecutters, teamsters, wagoners, road builders, stevedores, and mariners.

On July 16, 1752, stonecutter John Grant, whose business was located in Taylor Alley, between Front and Second streets, in Philadelphia, had put up for auction "A Likely young Negroe man, who has been employed for some years in the stone cutting business, country born, and has had the small pox." In July 1776, an advertisement touted the skills of "a strong healthy NEGROE Man, 25 Years of Age," who "can work in the Brick yard, is handy, and can turn his Hand to any Kind of Business." A number of notices highlight proficiency at cooking, such as a May 10, 1770, advertisement for "A COMMODIOUS well finished BAKE HOUSE, with two Ovens, convenient Granaries, and every Thing necessary for carrying on said Business," along with "a Negroe Man, who understand Baking well . . . situate in Front



Hubert Julian, a.k.a. the "Black Eagle" worked for a Harrisburg company that provided aerial photography. Photo from the Pennsylvania State Archives, MG 281. Used with permission.

Street, near Mr. John Hart Corner, in Southwark. For Particulars, enquire of ANNE REARDON, at the aforesaid Place.”²⁰³

As for specialties such as cobbling, advertisements proffered “A Likely Negroe man, by trade a shoemaker. Enquire of Widow Dawson, in Second street, Philadelphia,” as well as notices trumpeting “To be SOLD, A Likely Negroe man, a shoemaker by trade, and has been in this country from a child, and has had the small pox. Enquire at George Morrison, next door to the Quaker meeting house, in Second street, Philadelphia.”²⁰⁴

There were a number of announcements highlighting professions related to seafaring, including two dating to the early 1740s: “TO BE SOLD, A NEGRO man, a Sail maker, and a good Saylor,” and “TO BE SOLD , THREE Negro Men Sail Makers, and a new Chair for one Horse, with Harness., &c. belonging to the Estate of William, Chancellor, deceased.”²⁰⁵

Among the thousands of notices placed for male African Americans who had escaped slavery, an array of parallel occupations often comprised the centerpiece of such advertisements. A “FIVE POUNDS reward” was offered for the apprehension of a “Negroe slave, named Isaac Jones, about 20 years of age” who “RAN away from his master, living in Germantown Township, Philadelphia County, on the 28th of March last.” Published on April 12, 1786, the notice elaborated that Jones might attempt to use his livelihood as an evasive technique: “the Said Negroe was brought up a sailor . . . it is thought he will try to get on board some vessel; all masters of vessels are forewarned not to take away nor harbour said slave.”²⁰⁶

Advertisements convey stories of slaves who escaped from communities outside Philadelphia, including “a Negro man named BAMBY,” employed as “a tanner,” who fled from his master in “Allens Town, Northampton County,” and Peter Commings, a runaway said to have been a talented “cordwainer” from “Providence Township, Montgomery Township,” who eventually escaped eighteen years after the passage of the 1780 Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery.²⁰⁷

One notice sought the immediate capture of a fugitive slave named Joe, “aged twenty-two,” who had worked for Jacob Rush. A prominent colonial era lawyer and member of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court, Rush was the younger brother of Dr. Benjamin Rush, a signer of the Declaration of Independence. The younger Rush was exceptionally disappointed that his slave ran off because Joe could “read, write and cook, and take care of horses, drive a carriage, and wait on a gentleman,” responsibilities that were apparently sorely missed.²⁰⁸

Occupations of Free African Americans Before 1860

It is important to examine a group of laborers who, consequently, comprised the largest bloc of African American workers in Pennsylvania during the 18th and first half of the 19th centuries: free African Americans. The work these individuals performed demonstrates the same wide

range of skilled and unskilled positions in which the slave population worked, with the important distinction that these individuals were at least legally free. This freedom did not necessarily afford these workers the same opportunities that were available to others, however, because prejudice often closed doors that were once open to them. Racism also facilitated scenarios in which they were either unjustly treated or unfairly compensated. Nevertheless, the level of autonomy which many of these individuals attained expresses the vibrancy of Pennsylvania's free African American working community. The Commonwealth's free African American workers up to the mid-19th century, irrespective of status or employment, served as trailblazers to the millions of other laborers who eventually followed them.

Properties identifying the work experiences of African Americans include an array of significant documents that illuminate this diversity and richness. One of these manuscripts, "Register of Trades of Colored People in the City of Philadelphia and Districts," contains a city census taken in 1838 of occupations of tradesmen and tradeswomen:

Bakers—9	Hair-Dressers—95
Basket-Makers—3	Iron Forgers—1
Blacksmiths—23	Masons—2
Black and White Smiths—5	Millers—3
Bleeders—9	Milliners and Dressmakers—25
Bleeders and Hairdressers—5	Nail-Makers—2
Boot and Shoemakers—91	Painters—6
Brass-Founders—2	Painters and Glaziers—11
Brewers—1	Paper-Makers—1
Bricklayers—6	Plasterers—1
Bricklayers and Plasterers—5	Plumbers—3
Brush-Makers—3	Potters—1
Cabinet-Makers—15	Printers—3
Cabinet-Makers and Carpenters—5	Rope-Makers—3
Carpenters—40	Sail-Makers—19
Caulkers—2	Scythe and Sickle Makers—1
Chair-Bottomers—2	Ship Carpenters—4
Confectioners—5	Stone Cutters—1
Coopers—5	Sugar Refiners—3
Curriers—2	Tailoresses—17
Dentists—1	Tanners—31
Dress-Makers—74	Tanners and Curriers—6
Dress-Makers and Tailoresses—14	Tin Plate Workers—1
Dryers and Scouers—4	Tobacconists—2
Fullers—4	Weavers—5
Glass Makers—2	Wheelwrights—6 ²⁰⁹

One specific example of an African American family of artisans who worked in Philadelphia and who were among the nineteen sail-makers were the men of the Forten family. James Forten Jr. and Robert B. Forten had worked for their father, James Forten Sr., who founded and owned the business. Forten's biographer Julie Winch believed that "of the remaining sixteen [sailmakers], most worked for Forten." The senior Forten, born in 1766 in Philadelphia, joined the Continental navy in 1781 at the age of fifteen. He was captured by the British and held as a prisoner on a ship named the *Jersey*. Returning to Philadelphia unharmed after the war's end, he worked as an apprentice to Robert Bridges, a sail-maker. In 1798, Forten purchased the loft which Bridges used for his business. Over the course of several decades, Forten became established as one of the premier sail-makers in the city, a niche his sons occupied after his death in 1842. Winch concluded the Fortens' business empire became a powerful entity that operated on local, state, regional, Trans-Atlantic, and international levels. She noted that among his many contacts and business interests was a significant relationship with "Patrick Hayes, the nephew of Commodore Barry," who in his own shipping firm "had extensive interest in the China trade and in commerce with Cuba." When Hayes's company constructed two vessels in the 1820s, "the brig *Emma* and the ship *Tontine*," Winch determined that "James Forten and his sons made sails for both vessels."²¹⁰

Teaching was not listed as an occupation in the Philadelphia 1839 trades census. It was typically a

woman's domain. James Forten Sr.'s wife Charlotte Vandine Forten, with the couple's three daughters, Harriett, Sarah, and Margaretta, worked during much of the 19th century. Margaretta was a teacher for several decades in Sarah Mapps Douglas's school for African American children, which Douglas founded in 1820. She also founded, in 1850, her own school for African American youth, and had, among its illustrious educators, Charlotte Forten Grimke. Grimke was best known for her work among the freedmen of the South during and after the Civil War.²¹¹

A decade later, the 1849 "Statistical Inquiry into the Condition of the People of Colour, of the City and Districts of Philadelphia," showed a marked increase in the number of males employed in the trades. There's also a new category that breaks down the spheres of skilled and unskilled occupations. The survey included a separate category for women who, although mentioned in the



A young African American boy looks on as workers unload produce at Dock Street, Philadelphia, 1919. From the Pennsylvania State Archives, MG 219. Used with permission.

1839 census implicitly as Tailoresses, Dress-Makers and Weavers, were cited explicitly in a wide range of categories. These changes distinguished this census from its earlier counterpart. Among the skilled grouping, shopkeepers and traders comprised 166 individuals:

- 77 oyster and eating house keepers
- 52 second-hand clothes dealers
- 22 furniture dealers
- 34 confectioners and cake sellers
- 32 musicians
- 22 preachers
- 19 physicians and herb doctors

Among the unskilled occupations, which were not mentioned in the 1839 census, there were

- 1,581 Labourers
- 240 Seafaring men
- 276 Coachmen, carters, &c.
- 557 "Waiters, cooks, &c."

The occupations in these groups were broken down into a number of categories:

- Labourers and jobbers 603
- carters and draymen 157
- porters 444
- hod carriers 102
- work in brick yards 70
- stevedores 57
- white washers 40
- rappers and boners 51

The largest of these groupings of women's work was "Washerwomen," which listed their number as "1970," followed by

- Needle-women 486
- Cooks 173
- Occupied at home 290
- Domestics 786
- Living in Families 156
- Various 72
- Trades 213,
- Rappers and boners 103

These occupations illustrate the diversity of women's work, including ownership of businesses by Philadelphia's Free African American women. The survey lists:

216 dressmakers
 231 seamstresses
 19 tailoresses
 33 keepers of boarding, eating and oyster houses
 13 school mistresses
 10 cake bakers
 35 shopkeepers²¹²

By the mid-19th century, the Pittsburgh area shared with Philadelphia a similar diversification of African American labor, although Pittsburgh's black population lagged far behind Philadelphia. R. J. M. Blackett estimated that by 1830, Pittsburgh's blacks numbered 472, and there were 1,193 in Allegheny County," and that by 1850 "the black population of the city had increased to 1,959, and the County's rose to 3,431." Pittsburgh's black community, scholar Lawrence Glasco wrote,

was poor because racial discrimination excluded its men from the industrial and commercial mainstream of the city's economy. Barbering was the most prestigious occupation open to blacks, and they operated most of the downtown barbershops that catered to the elite . . . Most, however, could find work only as day laborers, whitewashers, janitors, porters, coachmen, waiters and stewards. The men's low earnings forced their wives to seek work outside of the home, typically in low paying and demeaning jobs as servants, domestics, and washerwomen.²¹³

An examination of Pittsburgh's notable black business owners suggests that many entrepreneurs achieved success by the mid-19th century, and that their establishments added greatly to the city's economic development. John B. Vashon, a barber, built one of the city's most successful bathhouses, of which the *Pittsburgh Gazette* took notice in 1833:

On Saturday evening, at the invitation of Mr. Vashon, we visited, and examined his new Baths, and were highly gratified with the arrangement and furnishing of the establishment. In the lower story of the building, he has thirteen bathing rooms, for the use of gentlemen who may visit them, each supplied with an abundance of hot and cold water of the purest quality taken from La Belle Riviere and furnished with everything necessary to the complete enjoyment of that most delightful and refreshing luxury . . . Every precaution has been taken to secure the ladies apartment the utmost privacy and security.²¹⁴

It isn't necessary to specifically examine the regions surrounding Philadelphia and Pittsburgh to determine if the breakdown of African American laboring opportunities for men and women during the 19th century was commonplace. Censuses taken in other locales reveal that African Americans were listed with these same occupation titles in virtually every county, although the most significant percentage of the African American population by mid-century lived in the greater Philadelphia and Pittsburgh areas. By the mid-19th century, despite the occurrence of a diversification of both skilled and unskilled labor among African Americans working on farms or iron furnaces, most other professions involving artisanship or shop keeping had not yet emerged in large numbers—a phenomenon changed with the advent of new industries by the end of the century.

In the Orange Township, Columbia County, census for 1850, only a handful of African Americans lived in the region at the time and most were recorded as laborers. Robert Semple, age 40, listed as a barber, lived with his wife Emily and their six children. The same was also true for Clearfield County; in 1850, the small black population worked primarily as day laborers on farms or as farmers who had owned land. Cezer Potter, with his wife and five children, owned a farm and possessed a net worth of \$1,500. There were a few significant exceptions to this rule in Clearfield County, such as the record of Samuel Birmingham, listed as “M” for “Mulatto” and recorded as being a “Doctor”; Jacob Jackson, who worked as a teamster; and Charles Burges, employed as a carpenter.²¹⁵

In the 1850 Blair County census, similar patterns emerge but virtually no African American artisans were recorded. However, James Snowden and James Alexander, listed as “Forgemen” in Blair Township, may have been skilled employees at one the area's several furnaces or forges. The few African Americans recorded were listed as “laborers,” such as Joseph Tyrone who, with his wife and two children lived, in Allegheny Township.²¹⁶

In Lock Haven, Clinton County, African Americans had lived there as of 1850, including individuals who held a wide variety of occupations. Samuel Smith, age 33, and Luther C. Smith, age 21, were identified as barbers. (Smith's assets were appraised at \$500.) Edward Smith, a member of the family and 35 years old, was recorded as a laborer, as was Mark Colvin, 61, Charles Richardson, 27, John Robinson, 45, John Logue, 38, John Johnston, 24, and Henry Hall, 35. William Wilson, age 19, was listed as a “boatman,” and brothers Hiram Graham and William Graham were identified as barbers. Outside Lock Haven, there were not many African Americans in the County, except for in Kating Township, where two surnames, Gains and Smokes, were represented by more than fifty individuals, in which all of the working age males were listed as laborers, with one exception: David Gains was a framer with a net worth of one thousand dollars.²¹⁷

To the south, in Granville Township, Mifflin County, many African American laborers are listed in the census, such as Edward Boalz and George Molson. There are also more variations in employment, such as the entries for John Wright, age 35, cook, James Stevens, age 28, waiter, and Joseph Carter, 35, porter, who appear in the document under the heading “Residence listed as Hotel.” The hotel was most likely owned by James Allison, who was listed as “Inn Keeper.”²¹⁸

Several business owners and entrepreneurs of note must not be overlooked because their stories are plentiful and enlightening. In the Berks County seat of Reading, Dinah Clark—who grew up as a slave on the Heidelberg Township farm of Samuel Jones—established a business for herself in the early 19th century as a jack-of-all trades: sawing and “splitting” “wood for kindling to use for cooking and baking,” cutting down and pruning trees, carrying coal, and other assorted jobs. Barbara Goda wrote,

Most of the Black women working in the cities found jobs in service areas: cooks, domestics, washerwomen, nursemaids, nannies and some were even street vendors. Philadelphia possesses a long and interesting tradition of women selling “pepper-pot,” hot corn and other goodies on the street....An itinerant sawyer, Widow Clark walked the streets with a sawbuck on her shoulders and a saw in hand to cut wood for people. Her customers would bring boards and planks, sometimes fallen tree limbs, out to the curbstone where she would set up shop. On occasion, clients asked her into their yards and gardens to cut down specific trees. At one time Dinah could saw and split two and one-half cords of wood a day for which she was paid a dollar and a half. Cutting wood earned more money than doing laundry.²¹⁹

Scholar David Zimmerman offered an account of the enormously prosperous Stephen Smith and William Whipper, of Columbia, Lancaster County. “Whipper amassed a sizable fortune through joint ventures with his business partner Stephen Smith,” he wrote. “Their extensive investments included land holdings in Pennsylvania and Canada, lumberyards, railroad cars, and a steam ship on Lake Erie. Many of these assets were directly employed in aiding the escapes of black fugitives from the south.” Smith and Whipper’s extensive operations provided many African Americans with a variety of jobs.

In his 1921 article entitled “Lancaster Colonization Society,” William Frederic Worner wrote,

Stephen Smith in Philadelphia, and William Whipper in Columbia, whose business had grown to be quite extensive, were valuable

members of their respective communities. Both, by the judicious investment of their capital, had kept in constant employment a large number of persons. They purchased many rafts at a time and much coal. It was not only the Negro laborer in ‘drawing boards’ and the coal hauler and heaver that were benefited from the capital of Smith and Whipper, but also the original owners of the lumber and coal, as well as the large number of boatsmen and raftsmen for bringing the commodities to market.²²⁰

Life for an African American entrepreneur was not always easy because of the explicit and implicit effects of racism, especially when operating in rural communities such as Columbia. Stephen Smith’s treatment in the small community led to his relocation to Philadelphia in the early 1840s. He suffered a number of injustices on a regular basis. Harassment, including public protests, was meant to discredit and terrorize him and his business associates. On February 27, 1835, several months after anti-black mobs set fire to African American businesses and homes in Columbia and struck out at black residents in the community, a public notice specifically targeted Smith. Many Columbia residents resented the fact that his lumber and real estate empire was growing at a torrid pace. The notice’s language was particularly strong.

S. Smith: You have again assembled yourself against the white people to bid up property, as you have been in the habit of doing a number of years back. You must know that your presence is not agreeable, and the less you appear in the assembly of whites, the better it will be for your black hide, as there are a great many in this place that would think your absence from it a benefit, as you are considered an injury to the real value of property in Columbia.²²¹

Smith eventually departed, but not before being ordained a preacher by the AME church. For a time, he remained in Columbia and continued to build his business empire and fought back against the forces of bigotry. William Wright, John Wright, and James Wright, with Smith’s endorsement, placed a reward in the *Columbia Spy* for



African American surgeons working on a patient, n.d. From the Pennsylvania State Archives, RG13. Used with permission.

information and a reward leading to the identification of the anonymous author who had published the anti-Smith notice. Smith issued a statement to the *Columbia Spy*, stating “I shall continue to prosecute my business with usual vigor, and will be ready on every occasion to execute all orders in my line with promptness and dispatch.”²²²

In Pennsylvania, from the colonial era up until 1860, men and women, enslaved and free, worked in a variety of skilled and unskilled jobs. Laboring as agricultural laborers, forge and furnace men, skilled artisans, domestics, weavers and servants or as entrepreneurs, businessmen and women or as other specialists, they laid the foundations for their communities and created an environment in which independent black institutions flourished. These individuals opened the door for their successors who followed in their footsteps.

The road to steady and fair employment was not always easy. The changing nature of economics by the mid-19th century, together with the evolution of racism and discrimination as ingrained biological and social theories, closed doors at the same time. In particular regions, the holding of certain jobs ebbed, and new opportunities appeared in their stead, especially because of the Industrial Revolution and the changing dynamic of Pennsylvania’s workplaces.

Notes

¹⁴³ Ledell-Smith, “Agricultural in Pennsylvania,” *Historic Pennsylvania Leaflet* no. 44, Harrisburg: Pennsylvania Historic and Museum Commission, 2001; “The Demand for Slave Labor in Colonial Pennsylvania.” *Pennsylvania History*. Volume 34 Number 4 (October 1967), 333; Turner, *The Negro in Pennsylvania*, 38-40; Wright, *The Negro in Pennsylvania*, 19-21; Nash and Soderlund, *Freedom By Degrees*, 32-41.

¹⁴⁴ *The Negro (Slave) Register of Washington County, Pennsylvania, From 1782 to 1851*. Photocopied from original in the office of the Recorder of Deeds, Washington, Washington County, Pennsylvania, 1974, found in Citizens Library, Washington County, 1-23 (October 1st of 1782 November 26, October 1st of 1782 to November 30th of 1782).

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Henry Graham Ashmead, *History of Delaware County Pennsylvania*. Philadelphia: L.H. Everts & Co. 1884, 204-205.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ *The Negro (Slave) Register*, 15; F.S. Reader, *Some Pioneers of Washington County: A Family History*, 1902, pp. 35-50.

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- ¹⁵⁰ John W. Jordan, *Genealogical and Personal History of Beaver County*. New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, 1914, 1044-1045; *The Negro (Slave) Register*, 17.
- ¹⁵¹ Richard S. Newman, *The Transformation of American Abolitionism*, Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2002, 76; *The Negro (Slave) Register*, 16.
- ¹⁵² William-Watts Hart Davis, *The History of Bucks County, Pennsylvania*. New York: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1905 Second edition. (Update of 1876 edition), 796; Jacob Painter, *Reminiscence, Gleanings, and Thoughts*, n.p. found at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, VoD.54, 11-12.
- ¹⁵³ Ibid.
- ¹⁵⁴ Morton L. Montgomery, *Historical and Biographical Annals of Berks County, Pennsylvania*. Chicago: J.H. Beers and Company, 1909, 354-355.
- ¹⁵⁵ *Pennsylvania Gazette*, February 6, 1766; October 12th, 1774; April 21, 1773.
- ¹⁵⁶ *Pennsylvania Gazette*, June 9th, 1768; Feb. , 1762; April 20, 1774; March 31, 1773.
- ¹⁵⁷ *Pennsylvania Gazette*, Oct. 9th 1776; Gazette, October 11, 1764; February 27, 1793.
- ¹⁵⁸ Nash and Soderlund, *Freedom By Degrees*, 186-193; Marianne H and Paul A. Russo. *Hinsonville: A Community at the Crossroads: The Story Of A 19th-Century African-American Village*. Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 2005, 10-13; Lucy Simler, "The Landless Worker: An Index of Economic and Social Change in Chester County, Pennsylvania, 1750-1820. *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 114, no.2 (1990): 163-99; See also Carl D. Oblinger, "Black Underclass in Southeastern Pennsylvania" in John E. Bodnar's *The Ethnic Experience in Pennsylvania*. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1973 and Robert Sutcliffe's *Travels in Some Parts of North America in the Years 1804, 1805 and 1806*, Philadelphia: B& T Kite, 1812.
- ¹⁵⁹ Nash and Soderlund, *Freedom By Degrees*, 88-89.
- ¹⁶⁰ Oblinger, "Black Underclass in Southeastern Pennsylvania," 99.
- ¹⁶¹ Oblinger, "Black Underclass in Southeastern Pennsylvania," 116; *Kennett Advance*, October 8th, 1892.
- ¹⁶² John W. Tillman, *Biographical Sketch of the Life and Travels of John W. Tillman, Doe Run, Chester County, Penna.*, 1986, Delaware Historical Society Research Library, 16-17.
- ¹⁶³ 1860 Federal Census, Delaware County, Pennsylvania, DIVISION: Aston REEL NO: M653-1105, 178, 180.
- ¹⁶⁴ 1860 Federal Census, Greene County, Pennsylvania, Reel No: M653-1114 Division: Center Township, 121, 123; Samuel P. Bates, *History of Greene County, Pennsylvania*, Chicago: Nelson, Rishforth & Co., 1888, 587.
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- ¹⁶⁶ Ibid; Gettysburg National Military Park, "Abraham Brien Farm," Vertical File 1-110; <http://www.nps.gov/gett>
- ¹⁶⁷ 1860 Federal Census, Greene County, Pennsylvania, Division: Jackson Township, 144, 182; Division: Center Township, 124.
- ¹⁶⁸ 1860 Federal Census, Delaware County, DIVISION: Lower Chichester REEL NO: M653-1105, 16; 1860 Federal Census, Delaware County, DIVISION: Radnor Township REEL NO: M653-1105, 57.
- ¹⁶⁹ Marianne and Paul Russo, *Hinsonville*, 19, 31, 62.

- ¹⁷⁰ Ibid.
- ¹⁷¹ Ibid.
- ¹⁷² Ibid., 63, 135.
- ¹⁷³ Glasco, *WPA History of the Negro in Pittsburgh*, 188.
- ¹⁷⁴ Litwack, *North of Slavery*, 176; Douglass in Foner, *Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass*, vol. 2, 36.
- ¹⁷⁵ <http://denise.dennis.free.fr/> See also Andre Maykuth's "Family's Dilemma: Gas Rights vs. Black Heritage," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Feb. 7th, 2010; Federal Census, Clearfield County, DIVISION: Decatur Twp. REEL NO: 768, 342a. The other was Cezar Potter's Family Farm worth 1500 dollars see 1850 Federal Census, Clearfield County, DIVISION: Bradford Twp REEL NO: 768, 332a.
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- ¹⁷⁹ "William Bird" in *The Colonial Dames of America Ancestral Records and Portraits: A Compilation from the Archives of Chapter 1*, Baltimore, 1910, 650-652; Walker, "Negro Labor," 468; See also the Forges and Furnaces Collection at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Birdsborough Forges, Journals and Daybooks.
- ¹⁸⁰ Lancaster County Historical Society MG-240, "The Slave Records of Lancaster County Collection," Box 1, Folder 2; "Tax Lists, Inhabitants and Slaves, 1800, 1807," Microfilm. Pennsylvania State Archives, RG-47--Records of County Governments. See also the Forges and Furnaces Collection at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Cornwall Furnace, Grubb, Coleman Iron Works.
- ¹⁸¹ "The Slave Records of Lancaster County Collection," Box 1, Folder 2; "Tax Lists, Inhabitants and Slaves, 1800, 1807," Microfilm. Pennsylvania State Archives, RG-47--Records of County Governments. See also the Afrolumens Project Website listings of slaveholders in Pennsylvania at <http://www.afrolumens.org/slavery/lebanon.html>.
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- ¹⁸³ *Pennsylvania Gazette*, April 16, 1767, July 27th 1769; National Society of the Colonial Dames of America, *Forges and Furnaces in the Province of Pennsylvania*, Philadelphia: Printed for the Society, 1914, 60.
- ¹⁸⁴ *Pennsylvania Gazette*, August 27, 1761, November 3, 1763, October 11, 1770.

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- ¹⁹⁹ *Pennsylvania Gazette*, October 4th, 1744, July 19th, 1739.
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- ²¹⁷ Federal Census, Clinton County, DIVISION: Borough of Lock Haven REEL NO: M432-768, 59b; 55a, 56a, 61b, 60a; 1850 Federal Census, Clinton County, DIVISION: Kating Township REEL NO: M432-768, 85a, 85b, 86a, 87a.
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Chapter 4

African American Labor in Pennsylvania, 1860 to 1965

After the American Civil War the 2nd Industrial Revolution, followed by a world war, Depression, another world war, and finally deindustrialization, dramatically altered the demographics and operations of Pennsylvania's workforce. The search for employment mobilized the nation's African American population, first in a Great Migration of rural workers from the South to northern manufacturing cities, and then in a redistribution of population among northern communities as job-seekers followed work opportunities. The political and social repercussions were enormous. Although wages, benefits, and job security always lagged behind those for white workers, by the end of World War 2, Pennsylvania's cities had a strong concentration of skilled working and middle class black residents with the income, interest, and intent to reach the goal of equality.

There was a significant increase in the employment of African American males in the Commonwealth's steel, coal, and brick industries throughout the late 19th and well into the mid-



Demolition of Dauphin County Courthouse, 1940s. Photo from Dauphin County Historical Society. Used with permission.

20th century (although fluctuations in employment practices varied depending upon the geography, the company, or the specific decade). During this period, levels of business ownership and employment as artisans, tradesmen, and tradeswomen increased among Pennsylvania's African American population, leading to the establishment of vibrant African American business districts in a number of rural, semi-urban and urban communities. By the mid-1930s, the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) offered new opportunities for thousands of

young African American men looking for work. By the early 1940s, the industrial-military complex that emerged during World War II offered jobs to black men and women on the home front, breaking new barriers on the color-line along the way. Simultaneously, white supremacists in Pennsylvania fostered workforce prejudice, augmented the rift between unions and strikebreakers (often comprised disproportionately of African American men because they were at first denied membership in unions because of race), and sometimes created an atmosphere where violence or other manifestations of hatred, such as mass deportations, were directed against African American workers.

The disadvantageous effects that the Great Depression had for many Americans were calamitous for African Americans. Business shut-downs often led to mass lay-offs that struck African American workers particularly hard, leading to the motto, "last-hired, first-fired." Because jobs were scarce during this period, internal migrations out of many locales and into a select few communities in the Commonwealth occurred with regularity from the 1920s through the 1940s, leading to the decline of bustling centers of African American business and social life in communities such as Phillipsburg, Waynesburg, Indiana, Johnstown, and Bedford. At the same time, population increased in cities such as Altoona, Mt. Union, Williamsport, Pittsburgh, and Philadelphia, all of which had occupations available to Pennsylvania's growing native black population and the large influx of immigrants from southern states. The Second World War again shifted the employment picture for black Pennsylvanians. High demand for labor in the war industries pulled many African American men to the large industrial centers of Pittsburgh and Philadelphia for relatively high paying jobs. However these jobs disappeared after the war. In the restructuring of Pennsylvania's post-war economy all workers suffered, and manufacturing jobs were outsourced overseas, leaving hundreds of Pennsylvania communities with empty factories, dying downtowns, and streetsful of abandoned housing. In the general atmosphere of blight, black Pennsylvanians took the brunt of the losses with unemployment rates reaching as high as 30% in some areas of the state.

Steel

The history of African Americans in Pennsylvania's steel mills is long and varied. The steel industry's growth followed on the heels of the downturn in the significance of the iron furnace industry and the discovery of large reserves of anthracite and bituminous coal, the fuel sources necessary to run such intensive operations. The implementation of the Bessemer process in the late 19th century (along with the crucible steel process), enabled the mass production of steel with low-levels of impurities. Fashioned from molten pig iron on an unprecedented scale, it led to a boom in providing stronger materials for everything from bridges and edifices to railroads and shipbuilding.²²³

According to the 1928 Negro Survey of Pennsylvania, conducted between 1924 and 1927 at the behest of the Pennsylvania Department of Welfare and the Armstrong Association of

Philadelphia, four districts in Pennsylvania in 1925 were active in employing African Americans in the steel industry: the western Pennsylvania region, including the Pittsburgh area and the Beaver and Mahoning valleys; the Johnstown, Altoona, and Conemaugh area; the Harrisburg region, including Steelton, Middletown, and Carlisle; and the Coatesville region. The Survey found "the trade group which employs the largest number of Negroes is the iron and steel industry, which in July of 1925, employed 14, 118."

This study examines two regions in particular, Pittsburgh, Allegheny County, and Coatesville, Chester County.²²⁴ One of the first of the new generation of iron and steel businesses in Pittsburgh to hire African American employees was the Black Diamond Steel Works, run by several prominent members of one of the city's enterprising business families, the Parke brothers. The Parkes were displeased with the "havoc" created by the rise of white puddler's unions in the city in 1875, especially the Sons of Vulcan, organized to demand better wages and working conditions. To counter this threat, they and other business owners, including the managers of the Pittsburgh Bolt Company, decided to import African American puddlers from the South to operate the largely abandoned blast furnaces.²²⁵

While this initial entry into the burgeoning industry by large numbers of black workers may seem to have been dubious, at least two significant phenomena that can better explain this lack of allegiance to the union movement must be taken into consideration. Most African Americans who had labored during the period of these strikes (as well as for decades following them), were not typically admitted to the predominant labor unions that had arisen following the Civil War. Clarifying these circumstances, the scholar Dennis C. Dickerson, wrote:

Black exclusion from organized labor provided industrial employers with opportunities to use Black workers to defeat striking White unionists. Uncertainty on the issue of biracial unionism characterized the positions of most labor federations in the late 19th century. Within individual unions, however, forthright statements and practices which barred Black membership usually prevailed. . . . Since the majority of affiliate unions enforced racial restrictions through constitutional and ritualistic bans and through informal exclusionary practices, Black members . . . remained pitifully few.²²⁶

Such was certainly the case for the National Labor Union, founded in 1866, and the Knights of Labor, organized in 1869, which, with Samuel Gompers' American Federation of Labor (AFL), established in 1886, called for only limited memberships for African American unionists.

Many early African American steelworkers did not value memberships in such unions at all, nor did they feel any sympathy for their causes, which in theory may have been appealing but in practice only illustrated the intolerance and bigotry on the part of the white unionists to not expand their cause to include all laboring men, regardless of race.

Regardless of whether these early African American steelworkers had been comprised of native Pennsylvanians or were among those who arrived in the first wave of black migration to the North, these laborers felt that they were more than capable to fill such jobs. The aptitude and skills of workers who had formerly toiled in Pennsylvania's iron furnaces before the emergence of the steel industry made them logical choices for employees in the new firms. The African American ironworkers recruited to come North were at the vanguard of the Great Migration, which was the case, incidentally, with the puddlers who came to the Pittsburgh Bolt Company and the Black Diamond Steel Works. They had been trained at ironworks in Virginia and Tennessee while being employed as either slaves or freemen.²²⁷

Many African American laborers felt spurned by labor unions that denied admittance and they took issue with their alleged status as strikebreakers, prompting many to speak out against the slight and elaborate on their abilities and the reasons for their allegiances. A "Colored Puddler at Black Diamond Steel Works," John Lucus Dennis, drafted a letter to the renowned African American journal the *New York Freeman* in 1887, explaining his position regarding a strike at his company in the summer of that year. Dennis opened his letter, entitled "A Pittsburgh Strike: Why the Colored Workmen Take Little Part In It," by asserting:

As a strike is now in progress at the Black Diamond Steel Works, where many of our race are employed, the colored people hereabouts feel a deep interest in its final outcome. As yet few colored men have taken part in it, it having been thus far thought unwise to do so. It is true our white brothers, having joined the Knights of Labor and organized the strike without conferring with, or in any way consulting us, now invite us to join them and help them obtain the desired increase in wages and control of the Knights of Labor of the works. But as we were not taken into their schemes at its inception, and as it was thought by them that no trouble would be experienced in obtaining what they wanted without our assistance, we question very much the sincerity and honesty of this invitation.²²⁸

Further expounding on the themes of racism and expediency, Dennis continued:

Our experiences as a race with these organizations has, on the whole, not been such as to either give us great satisfaction or confidence in white men's fidelity. For so often after we have joined them, and the desired object has been attained, we have discovered that sinister and selfish motives were the whole and only cause that led them to seek us as members.²²⁹

He offered an example of an occurrence in which African Americans joined one such union, and then paid the consequences for it dearly due to the grim reality of bigotry, intolerance, and discrimination:

A few years ago, a number of colored men working at this mill were induced to join the Amalgamated Association, thereby relinquishing the positions which they held at these works. They were sent to Beaver Falls, Pa., to work in a mill there controlled by said Association, and the men there, brothers too, mark you, refused to work with them because they were black. It is true Mr. Jaret, then chairman of that Association, sat down upon those skunks, but when that mill closed down, and those men went out from there to seek employment in other mills governed by the Amalgamated, while the men did not openly refuse to work with them, they managed always to find some pretext or excuse to keep from employing them.²³⁰

In closing his letter, Dennis affirmed that he was a proponent of what organized labor had stood for: a just and fair working place with adequate compensation for workers, opportunities for advancement, and the right to a safe environment. However, the hypocrisy and reality of the situation established for him—and many others like him—the reluctance to join such unions, forcing them to come up with guidelines as to how white union leaders could better recruit back unionists in the future. "Now, Mr. Editor [Booker T. Washington's associate, T. Thomas Fortune], I am not opposed to organized labor," wrote Dennis.

God forbid that I should be when its members are honest, just and true! But when I join any society, I want to have pretty strong assurances that I will be treated fairly. I do not want to join any organization the members of which will refuse to work by my side because the color of my skin happens to be of a darker hue than their own. Now what the white men in these organizations should and must do, if they want colored men to join with and confide in them, is to give them a square deal—give them a genuine white

man's chance-and my word for it they will flock into them like bees into a hive. If they will take Mr. B. F. Stewart's advice! 'take the colored man by the hand and convince him by actual fact that you will be true to him and not a traitor to your pledge.'²³¹

The Homestead Strike of 1892 illustrated the harsh realities of what could happen to African American strikebreakers and their families if they did not support the union cause. The strike, which took place at Carnegie Steel's Homestead Plant, was initiated on June 28, 1892, by the Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel in response to a dramatic cut in the steelworkers' pay. On July 6, the bloodiest day of the revolt, the strikers fought against guards employed by the Pinkerton Detective Agency, a private police force frequently utilized by businesses to quell such uprisings. Although the workers pushed the Pinkertons back, Governor Robert E. Pattison dispatched the state militia several days later to reclaim the steelworks. By November, the strike was finally crushed, but not without a reign of terror inflicted upon the homes and properties of Homestead's African American community. This was an ironic twist because the African American strikebreakers who worked for the plant had not been allowed to participate in the union. Paul Krause, in his book entitled *The Battle for Homestead, 1880-1892*, wrote, "Racial unrest throughout the summer and fall and finally exploded in a massive anti-black riot on 13 November that saw 2,000 whites, many of them East European immigrants, attack the fifty black families who were by then living in Shantytown."²³²

Owners of the steel plants realized the African American workers they were recruiting possessed a long history and proficiency in such work, making them good candidates for employment at new mills, at cheaper rates. Over the next several decades, there were many steel mills in and around Pittsburgh, such as the numerous mills in Clairton, which employed African American laborers in skilled and unskilled positions. Scholar Richard Wright, when commenting upon the



American Rolling Mill Company (ARMCO) Colored Hospital, East Side Works, c. 1925. Photo from Urban League of Pittsburgh. Used with permission.

composition of the workforce in Pittsburgh's steel mills in his dissertation on the economic history of African Americans in Pennsylvania, published in 1912 by the AME Book Concern, avowed that:

Negroes are largely employed in the steel mills and some have very responsible places. Negro Puddlers are used exclusively in the Park's Mills (The Black Diamond); Negro rollers are employed in the Old Clark's mills, now owned by the Carnegie Steel Company, of the United States Steel Corporation.

Wright also wrote, "In Clark's Mills, Pittsburgh, there are three Negro foremen, having under them as high as twenty men, white, as well as black."²³³

Between 1910 and 1920, the first Great Migration increased the African American population from 25, 623 to 37, 725; from 1920 to 1930, it swelled to 54, 983. The *Pittsburgh Courier* routinely covered the entrance of new laborers into jobs such as steel mill work. In an article appearing in the August 30, 1912, edition, entitled "Demand and Supply," the newspaper took much delight at the U.S. Steel Corporation's desire to import African Americans to the city to fill new positions.

Now comes the action of the great United States Steel Corporation sending down East and South [agents] and importing more than 100 experienced Negro mill workers for their Homestead plant. . . . This shows that the Negro-if he makes good-can find employment and dissipates to a degree at least the old cry of discrimination.²³⁴

The *Courier* published similar stories touting these workers and the positive effect that they had on the local economy for the next several decades under such headlines as "Migrant Workers Benefit By Big Business Boom in Pittsburgh Steel and Iron" and "Negro Accepted as a Valuable Asset in American Industry," which included excerpts from Emmet J. Scott's speech on the impact Southern black migrants exerted on the changing nature of the manufacturing sector of the North, especially in the steel industry.²³⁵

Peter Gottlieb, while researching his noteworthy work, *Making Their Own Way: Southern Blacks Migration to Pittsburgh, 1916-1930*, discovered that the living conditions of many of these migrants were akin to poverty, and that theirs was not usually an easy life. Even with the assistance of the Urban League and the many black churches which sought work and shelter for many of them, Gottlieb found that

the failure of Pittsburgh housing to meet migrants' customary standards, let alone their hopes for better conditions, contributed to

employers' problems in retaining their southern black employees. That some newcomers could find lodging only at long distances from their places of work was one factor increasing migrants' absences from jobs. Few Pittsburgh firms built single-family housing for the new workers, counting instead on the rundown structures that once had sheltered earlier mill recruits.²³⁶

By the 1930s, the admission of more African American steel workers into labor unions began to improve their living and working conditions, but the relationship of such workers to organized labor remained tenuous and tense. With the passage of the 1935 Wagner Act by the administration of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt to ensure a fairer process of collective bargaining with the creation of the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA) there was now a federal effort to try to unite the unions and business owners to, at least in part, try to avoid bloody strikes. Many African American leaders believed the wording of the act did not accord the same protection to potential black union laborers as it had to white unions. Scholar Paul D. Moreno argued this was because many in the African American community believed that "the bill would continue to allow unions to bar blacks from membership and would provide no protection for blacks who were admitted to white unions but discriminated against within them."²³⁷

Claude Barnett, founder of the Associate Negro Press, a syndicate that distributed stories of African American interest to the nation's black press, protested the push of labor to include African Americans laborers in their industrial organizing pursuits. Moreno believed Barnett had been "disappointed that the steel industry had not shown enough gratitude toward black loyalty," and "believed that they had not gotten adequate opportunity to advance out of hot and heavy jobs."²³⁸ The Wagner Act and the NIRA, paired with the advent and furthering of the principles of John L. Lewis' Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), offered to African Americans the chance for real union advancement, especially in the steel industry. In 1936, after the CIO formed the Steel Workers Organizing Committee (SWOC), groups that had been cold to the proposals of organized labor, such as the Urban League, began to soften.

Dennis C. Dickerson characterized the organizing drives in 1936 and 1937 as productive for the SWOC and the CIO in recruiting African American union members. He noted that the Urban League even changed its tact and invited as a guest speaker for its annual convention Ernest Rice McKiney, "a Black organizer at SWOC's Pittsburgh headquarters." Adding to these successes in the increase in enrollment of African American steel workers in the union cause was an almost simultaneous recommendation by the National Negro Congress which, with the CIO, "sponsored a conference of black leaders in Pittsburgh to discuss strategies for recruiting black laborers into the steel union." Among the influential African Americans who attended the conference were individuals from virtually every walk of life, including Bishop William J. Walls, head of the

Allegheny Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, and Robert L. Vann, editor of the *Pittsburgh Courier*. Their campaign was the primary reason the labor movement gained momentum among African American workers, despite the setbacks which would occur in the years to come, as these men had, Dickerson wrote, "all agreed to extensive use of church pulpits, the radio, and the press as the best ways to bring blacks to an awareness of SWOC."²³⁹

In concluding this look at the Pittsburgh area's steel industry during the early to mid-20th century, it's important to turn to the words of James Vactor, an individual who was interviewed for this study and whose experiences as a worker in several of western Pennsylvania's steel mills provide insight into the inner workings of life on the job. Vactor worked at Carrie Furnace, a part of the Homestead Iron and Steel Works owned by Andrew Carnegie which became part of his United States Steel Company in 1901. (Two of the company's furnaces, Numbers 6 and 7, were designated National Historic Landmarks by the U.S. Department of the Interior in 2006 in part because of their role in the 1892 strike at Homestead.) Vactor, who had grown up in the Canonsburg area, just south of Pittsburgh, worked at the furnace in the 1940s, following World War II. He explained in detail the operations of puddling and rolling at the mill, and discussed the dangers involved. "Oh, it was dangerous," Vactor remembered.

You'd see this guy tapped it out, and we stood back, while he'd tap it out we'd stay around the furnace, around the back of it. And he'd tap it out, and he was completely covered, you know, his head and everything [in protective gear]." Vactor recalled, "there were some guys who got burnt up . . . when they'd go to tap that thing out, to melt it down . . . he'd tap it out, and [the molten iron] would go down this little trough, out of this-and then there would be a little dig here, and that would be at the first cross." Vactor and his coworkers would then "open the gates and go in there, into the first door" where "it would splash on the walls." As the composite made its way down the channels to the rail cars, they closed the appropriate "bar and cut it off there. It was dangerous."²⁴⁰

After he lost his job because of declining work, Vactor moved to Meadville, Crawford County, where, among his many jobs, he found employment at Meadville Malleable Iron, 1947 to 1952. At this iron and steel works, the end result was a more refined type of iron as compared to what Vactor called "regular cast iron." He explained the process of turning the iron ore mixture into a malleable form of iron, by taking "it up to 1,500 degrees, and they keep it right there for about four or five hours, and then they shut it off, and let it cool down to a normal temperature. And it's a metal, you can take a hammer and hit it and it puts a dent in it. But if you hit it before then, it breaks. . . . When they would grind that hard stuff, they had a wooden torque, big thick pieces of

wood like that. And so it was-they'd drop a little brick, in the mold, they'd take a hammer, [to it, and] tink-tink-tink."²⁴¹

Vactor's comments about working in a hazardous environment are supported by documents. The *Pittsburgh Courier*, for instance, published numerous articles which highlighted the risky and often tragic nature of iron and steel work. In one story, which occurred on May 10, 1941, a thirty-five foot high furnace wall at the Jones and Laughlin Steel Corporation's Eliza Furnace Number 2, crumbled and killed an African American worker and injured eleven others. On October 24, 1947, the newspaper carried a story that was equally gruesome. "Two Hill District men were burned about the face and hands last Thursday in an explosion at Jones and Laughlin's number one open hearth furnace which took the lives of two other men. . . . Steam which originated in moisture in a pocket in the cinder pit of the furnace was blamed for the explosion. Those fatally injured were Dennis Lydon, 10 Musgrove Street, and Tony Spack, 418 Linial Street."²⁴²

Coatesville, Chester County

The Pittsburgh area was just one of several thriving steel regions in Pennsylvania that employed a substantial number of African American laborers during the early to mid-20th century. Other areas included Steelton, Dauphin County, and Bethlehem, Northampton County. To round out the story of Pennsylvania's black steelworkers, this study took a look at operations in the southeastern section of the Commonwealth, notably Coatesville, Chester County, where mills, such as Lukens Steel, became a significant employer of African Americans during much of the 20th century.

Lukens, founded in 1810 as the Brandywine Iron Works and Nail Factory by Isaac Pennock and Jesse Kersey, was leased to Pennock's son-in-law, Dr. Charles Lukens, in 1817. Known for making boiler plates for ships, the works was eventually inherited by Rebecca Lukens, Charles' widow, in 1825. Rebecca Lukens continued to push the company forward, and the firm flourished until her death in 1854. After her death, it operated as one of several emerging rolling mills in the region and, by the late 19th century, shifted its focus to the mass production of steel. By 1917, the business assumed the name by which it would be known for most of the 20th century, the Lukens Steel Company.²⁴³

By 1900, 433 African Americans lived in Coatesville as part of a thriving community of business owners, artisans, and laborers whose arrival dated to the period immediately following the Civil War. They developed a largely African American business and residential district known as the East End. Only a few of these individuals had worked in the region's nascent steel mills; however, this changed with the onset of the Great Migration, as many African Americans moved to Coatesville to find employment. By 1910, according to the Pennsylvania Negro Business

Directory, among the community's population of 1,800 African Americans, there were
 "Employed in Lukens Steel and Iron Company:

Trimming gang, plate mills, 92
 head and patent shearers, 6
 transfer tables, 10
 boiler room. 1
 conductors and shifters, 2
 open hearth stocking and supply department, 17
 open hearth scrap shears department, 32
 general labor, 12
 total, 172²⁴⁴



With these increases in the black population also came new challenges, as Richard Wright Jr., commented in 1912. Although there was "much immigration from the South during recent years," there also occurred a great "increase" in "race prejudice." The lynching of Zachariah Walker in the summer of 1911 was a manifestation of these hostilities, although the incident damaged the reputation of Coatesville's steel industry and the community in general for a brief period. Many African American migrants from the South who had a choice of employment opportunities,

decided to avoid Coatesville. In June 1912, an article entitled "Negroes Weren't Taking Any Chances" in the West Chester *Daily Local News* rebuked Coatesville's violent and discriminatory policies.

A gentleman of this place," the newspaper opined, "who has been on a business trip through the South, tells the story that recently he was in a town where an agent for one of the mills at Coatesville had arrived and was engaging help to bring on to the steel town to work in the plants there. He had succeeded in getting quite a number of colored men who arrived at the station prepared to come North. They had not been informed as to the destination, merely being told it was in Pennsylvania. One of the men finally asked where they were to go and when informed Coatesville was the place, they, one and all, picked up their belongings and started back into town, informing the representative of the steel works that

they heard about the way Coatesville treated colored people, and that 'they were not taking any chances.'²⁴⁵

Nevertheless, in the years following the Walker tragedy, wave upon wave of African American migrants were drawn to the Coatesville area and its steel mills, such as Lukens, as employment opportunities increased exponentially. Many of these new residents began to settle in an area known as South Coatesville, or Boxtown, adjacent to the mills. Conditions in this new section of town were anything but ideal. Even W. E. B. Du Bois commented on the nature of Coatesville's migrant housing dilemma and the problems African Americans encountered in the workplace in his 1923 article entitled "The Segregated World."

Today, a half a century since emancipation," Du Bois wrote, "the Negro Worker still has his difficulties. In the first place, he usually enters the lowest and worst paid positions with the most difficult working conditions and with little or no chance of advancement. One has but to view the housing offered Negroes in the employ of the newest steel merger: well-bred pigs ought not to be housed as colored workers are housed in and around Coatesville, Pa., by the Midvale, Bethlehem and other steel companies."²⁴⁶

In addition to dealing with deplorable housing and working conditions, African Americans living in Coatesville from the late teens through the 1920s were forced to confront the onset and growth of the white supremacist movement. The rebirth of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) in Georgia in 1915 eventually spread to states north of the Mason-Dixon Line, including Pennsylvania, and planted itself within the realm of all things social and political. However, the KKK was only a formal manifestation of the familiar bigotry and hatred that had been previously harbored by whites who were intolerant of African American mobility in the workplace and integration into the social fabric of the community-at-large, as groups such as "Law and Order Societies" had already functioned for several decades in the Coatesville region. The KKK's pervasiveness was so thorough that even the chief of the Lukens's police force, Charles Frymoyer, was part of the group, and his funeral was "very largely attended by members of various organizations . . . the Ku Klux Klan included."²⁴⁷

In a case surrounding the deportation of migrant steel workers from Coatesville in late winter 1919, literally hundreds of new migrants who had just been given employment at the Lukens and the Midvale Steel plants were rounded up by the police employed by the companies, many of whom had Klan affiliation, and placed on trains out of town. Leaders issued a statement that, "Coatesville emphatically denies deporting worthy negro laborers from the city . . . but admits taking a hand to rid the community of a lot of worthless men, both black and white, who refused

to work, and made it a practice out of fleecing their fellow men out of money in whatever manner they could."²⁴⁸

Regardless of these difficulties, the African American workforce at steel plants continued to grow through the 1920s— as did opportunities for advancement. In 1929, the *Pittsburgh Courier* published an article citing a report by the Armstrong Association of Philadelphia that, "Negroes have been employed [at Lukens] for a number of years" and "we find them better as plate handlers and shearers than white men," and that "their tonnage rate of payment is higher because of less rejected material." Occupational hazards did not diminish, and accidents and injuries were duly noted in articles published by black newspapers.²⁴⁹

As the result of burns received while working at the plant of the Lukens Steel Company," the *Philadelphia Tribune* reported, "William Wright, aged 45 years of 905 Coates Street, Coatesville, died at Coatesville Hospital on Tuesday last. He was a fire tender at one of the open hearth furnaces and his clothing caught fire. He was badly burned about the body and one arm had to be amputated as soon as he reached the hospital."²⁵⁰

Other than workplace conditions, usually less than ideal, the housing situation for African American workers was precarious as well. Yet this would change, at least in part, by winter 1941, when the plant, in conjunction with the federal government, brought in a team of architects led by the famous designer Louis Kahn to undertake the construction of housing for African American steel workers. Known as Carver Court, the complex of 100 units was begun in 1941 and completed in 1944. According to David Brownlee, the focus of the project was to build houses for steelworkers that were aesthetically pleasing as well as functional. "They realized that by lifting all of the living quarters to the second floor," Brownlee described Carver Court, "they could free the ground floor to provide ample storage and a carport that might easily be converted into one or more extra rooms. This 'essential space,' as they called it, was what made working-class homeowners put up with the other deficiencies of speculator-built, 'dicky-front houses,' and it was what was missing in government-built housing."²⁵¹

The Lukens plant was anything but a bastion of egalitarianism. One of the individuals interviewed for this study was Charles Butler, president of Coatesville's United Political Action Committee and later president of the state NAACP. He initiated a successful lawsuit with the aid of both organizations in 1973 on behalf of four African Americans employed by Lukens. The men contended they were unfairly treated by the company and their rights as union members were not respected and upheld. The suit, *Lukens v. Goodman*, called for the remuneration of back pay for years of unequal compensation on the part of the company and for reparations due to discriminatory practices in the workplace, failure to be promoted to better (and often less

dangerous) jobs, and the failure to attain union support on these matters. The men were proclaimed victorious in several state and federal rulings which were handed down in 1984 and 1985 and upheld by the Supreme Court in a 1987 ruling. However, the statute of limitations had expired and thus the amount of penalties to be accrued was lessened severely; many African Americans involved in the case, like Butler, believed the steelworkers and their widows may have won the battle, but lost the war.²⁵²

Working conditions at Lukens, Butler pointed out, were bleak and akin to what is usually thought of as the Jim Crow workplaces of the South. He decried the lack of vertical mobility, emphasizing African Americans "wouldn't get promoted" and contending that even "the washrooms were segregated." Butler mentioned an instance when he "was involved with the NAACP," during which he and his fellow comrades went "down there [to] meet with them [the plant supervisors]" and "we asked the guy why the washroom facilities were segregated." The manager's response, to the chagrin of Butler and his associates, was that "the Afro-Americans wanted to be together." Butler thought the answer absurd and retorted, "Now wait, I said, man, you ain't going to make me believe that."²⁵³

Another interviewee, John Robinson, recounted the tenuous circumstances of black laborers at Lukens from the 1940s to the 1970s. "They [the white supervisors] would not take a complaint from a black worker," Robinson said. "You had to go to your black representative in order to present-present a complaint-that in itself was one of the reasons why the lawsuit even came about. And there were other things, that, you know, blacks had a certain washroom, certain locker room, [and] could not go to another locker room."²⁵⁴

James Kennedy, the mayor of South Coatesville who had worked at the plant for a period of several decades, beginning in the 1930s, offered an especially vivid picture of what it was like to work at Lukens over the years. Kennedy, who moved to Coatesville as an infant with his family in 1913, insisted that opportunities for advancement were tough early on, remarking "as far as you could [go] was in the labor gang or the shears.



Driving the last spike on the low grade freight line, 1906. Photo from LancasterHistory.org. Used with permission.

Negroes couldn't get no other job." He remembered the working conditions were unhealthy, and that "it didn't get any better until we got the union in there, and that was around 1936 when they got the union in the mill. That's when it did get a little better." Nevertheless, Kennedy asserted, "you couldn't get the jobs," countering any sense of advancement made by the union.²⁵⁵

He supported the contention of the other interviewees who claimed the lavatories were segregated. He recounted a time in the late 1950s when he asked a supervisor if several of the white workers could join his fellow African American laborers undertaking some of the most grueling and unhealthful sewage work, "How about getting one of them guys to [go in there]?" He remembered the manager's reply: "Before I put one of them damn white boys in there, I'll close the damn shears down."²⁵⁶ "That's what existed," Kennedy said.

While much of the focus of this section centers on the lives of black steelworkers in two regions of Pennsylvania, there existed many other examples of significant levels of African American employment in the Commonwealth's steel plants. In Harrisburg, as of 1910, the Pennsylvania Negro Business Directory cited that the Central Iron and Steel Company employed "110 Negroes, 20 skilled workmen and 90 common laborers." In nearby Steelton, the directory noted, "The Pennsylvania Steel Company has for years, in fact ever since it was established, been large employers of Negro labor, both skilled and common," with the "total number of Negroes employed," equaling "three hundred."²⁵⁷ However, there were companies that refused to employ a substantial number of African American steel workers, such as the Bethlehem Steel Company, operating in Lehigh and Northampton counties. "The large Bethlehem steel plant," the directory reported, "which makes armor plate for the United States Government, and the head of which is Mr. Charles Schwab, the millionaire iron master, do not give employment to more than a round dozen of Negroes in any capacity whatever."²⁵⁸

Coal and Coke Industry

One of Pennsylvania's largest industries and one which involved a great number of African Americans was the coke and coal industry. As a fuel source for a number of industries, including the burgeoning steel trade, the mining of the raw material was of the utmost importance to keep pace with the mass production of manufactured goods.

African American mineworkers generally did not exist in large numbers in the anthracite (or hard coal) region

of northeastern Pennsylvania throughout the 20th century, but they gained a firm foothold in the bituminous (or soft) coal mining districts of southwestern Pennsylvania. Ronald L. Lewis, author of *Black Coal Miners in America*, offered a reason for the discrepancy:

In the older established anthracite region of Pennsylvania, for example, long apprenticeships were legislated in the 19th century

before blacks began their migration out of the South, and this practice effectively, if unintentionally, barred their entry into the field. Black miners, were, therefore, employed almost exclusively in the bituminous coal fields. Even in those fields, however, there was neither a uniform black presence nor a common pattern of race relations, but, rather, several unique regional histories.²⁵⁹

Although Lewis discussed this dilemma in the introduction to his book, he did not probe the history of black coal miners in Pennsylvania, focusing instead on the states in the Appalachian region that border the Keystone State. It is important to reconstruct these miners' lives using a disparate array of primary and secondary sources that have either explicitly covered some of their experiences or have incidentally glanced over them. Lewis' initial thesis can be confirmed by censuses that document the fact that relatively few black coal miners worked in the anthracite region. Several articles, however, at least seem to point to the potential for the employment of African American workers in this area. In an article appearing in the November 29, 1912, edition of the Warren Evening Mirror, entitled "Importing Negro Labor: Anthracite Operators Unable to Obtain Adequate White Workers," the Freeland, Luzerne County, correspondent wrote, "after vain attempts to secure white labor, either native or foreign," there "has begun the importation of negroes the first car load arriving yesterday . . . this is the first instance where negro [*sic*] labor has been imported into hard coal regions in a definite way to work about the mines. Other companies contemplate importing 3,000 laborers."²⁶⁰

Further investigation uncovers only a few examples of significant numbers of black coal miners working in the region. In 1912, for instance, Richard Wright wrote that in Luzerne County alone, there was "only one [black] stenographer" listed as an employee of a "large coal company." By the 1930s, more than several dozen African Americans were identified as coal miners in Wilkes-Barre's 11th Ward. The list contains the names of employees Charles B. Tykis, James Dawson, and Thomas Palmer, who had immigrated from the West Indies; Westley Hagins and Joseph Richardson, from South Carolina; William Dean, Charles Ducker, and Hillard Crawford from Virginia; William Gerard and Edwin Mabine, from North Carolina; and Scott Harris, from Georgia.²⁶¹

In interviews conducted with Gloria and J. D. Watson of Wilkes-Barre, it appears that during the period from the 1930s to the 1950s, African Americans worked in relatively large numbers in the region's mines. "I don't think they [the African American miners] had a problem there because," Watson recollected, "we know of a lot of coal miners-they have since passed away-I mean my uncle was a coal miner." Gloria Watson corroborated J. D.'s assessment, adding "My grandfather came here as a coal miner." J. D. also pointed out, "Most of the blacks, the one thing they could do was get a job in the mines." However, he contended, "That's basically all they really had to

look up [*and*] look forward to. But as you know, in the mines there were certain positions that they . . . kept away from certain people."²⁶²

Although limited employment opportunities existed for African Americans in the anthracite region, black laborers in the bituminous coal mines of western and southwestern Pennsylvania flourished (although their fortunes rose and fell with the economy, as well as because of intimidation, violence, bigotry and discrimination). The story of the Red Oak Coal Company in Fayette County is extraordinary.²⁶³

Incorporated in 1910 in Belle Vernon, just south of Monessen, the Red Oak Coal Company operated the Sterling Mine and was run by an African American, H. S. Sterling, who, the *Pittsburgh Courier* claimed, possessed "twenty-five years experience in the operation of coal mines." In a story appearing in the newspaper on May 27, 1911, the writer reported, "The Red Oak Coal Company, Inc. claims the unique and enviable distinction of being the largest Negro Concern on record to control and operate a successful coal mine without the help of a single white man."²⁶⁴ Sterling told the journalist that, "To illustrate the volume of business being done every day by this Negro enterprise, the April shipment of coal was 21 car loads. We have more orders for coal now than we can handle, and less than one-tenth of the coal lands we have leased remain untouched." Sterling kept the company managed and operated by blacks by offering shares in the operation to the community's African American residents. "The Red Oak Coal Company has decided to sell an additional five thousand dollars of their stock in order to give the thirty Negroes of this vicinity an opportunity to invest in a business that ought to be profitable, if properly managed," he announced.²⁶⁵

Examples as exceptional as this are difficult to find in the historical record, but it is known that even in the non- African American-operated mines of the era, many black miners labored in the bituminous coal region during the first several decades of the 20th century. The 1910 Negro Business Directory noted, "The general employment of the colored people throughout Fayette County, the population which is estimated at close to 10,000, is coke drawing and mining. Nearly all of the large coke and coal corporations give employment to colored men, varying in numbers from one to 500."²⁶⁶

Coal Mine workers and Unionism

There was a striking difference between the steel industry (at least for the first several decades of the 20th century) and the number of African American members in the United Mine Workers (UMW), which appears to have attracted many more African American coal miners by the end of the second decade of the 20th century. The *Pittsburgh Courier* published a number of positive portrayals of the UMW's gestures offered to African American workers and, correspondingly, noted that there occurred an increase of black members within its ranks, even during the great

coal strike of 1925-1927 in which many African Americans were brought in by companies who had hoped they would serve as strikebreakers.

In November 1926, as the influx of African Americans from the South reached its zenith and the strike in the bituminous coal fields was in full gear, the *Pittsburgh Courier* ran an article entitled "Coal Miners Band Selves Together Against 'Barons': Race Men Discover That They Are Able To Join Unions." According to the article, "last week, the coal miners, white and colored, of Western Pennsylvania have let it be known in no uncertain terms that their fight for a living wage, full recognition of the union and protection of the public against high prices of coal, has just begun." The article continued, "In a conversation with some colored men this week, it was stated by some of them that one of their chief reasons for desiring to join the union is because the union protects them in its constitution from any discrimination because of race, creed, or color."²⁶⁷ In a follow-up to this story on December 18, 1926, "Race Miners Steadily Enter Union Ranks," the *Courier* reported that one individual, a recent migrant from the South, had thanked the newspaper for "serving notice on colored men that the time is come when they should no longer permit any man to call them 'scabs.'"²⁶⁸ In summarizing the significance of these workers to the union's strength, the *Courier*, in an editorial published on April 9, 1927, stated that

the dominant factor in this struggle is the recently arrived Negro migrant who constitutes the backbone of the industry in the non-union soft-coal fields. . . . Here is a momentous struggle in which organized laborers are fighting grimly for decent wages, and proper protection on the job-both black and white unionists, if you please. A victory for the union means increased membership, greater prestige, and a nearer approach to the American standard of living for all miners. A victory for the operators means an extension of industrial feudalism, the further spread of the open shop, the lowering of wages and the general decline of living standards. The black-miners in the non-union fields will decide the issue.²⁶⁹

Regardless of union membership, African American miners in Pennsylvania's bituminous coal regions experienced a hostile climate and racial intolerance. On October 31, 1925, an article in the *Courier* reported that "officials of the Pittsburgh Coal Company have issued a statement deploring an attack on six colored employees Saturday night at Houston Pa., where one man was killed and three others wounded in a riot between union and non-union coal miners." In response to such brutality and the growing cases of coal company police forces targeting black union members in campaigns of violence and intimidation, Charles W. Fulp, an African American union member and organizer from Pittsburgh, traveled to New York City in January 1928 to raise money and awareness of the striking black miners and the hostilities directed against them.

Speaking at the AME Zion Meetinghouse on West 136th Street in New York, Fulp told the assembly stories "of families being evicted from their homes and terrorized by the coal and iron police," adding that these officers ran "their cars and motorcycles" into African American strikers. Fulp complained that the "armed mine guards" periodically "dumped" the belongings of these workers in the streets, and families were evicted from their "company houses in freezing weather." The result was that "starvation was rampant," and that these workers, whether union members or not, were the "victims of race hatred which mine owners have stirred up."²⁷⁰

In addition to Fulp's voice, historians uncovered a protest leveled against unfair working conditions for black coal miners, although it was undertaken by a group of non-unionized miners who had worked at the Montour Mine Number 1, owned by the Pittsburgh Coal Company. The miners, although not union members, were treated just as poorly as their unionized cohorts, illustrating that racism was entrenched in the African American working experience and that there was little, if any, chance for escaping it. In autumn 1927, the African American miners stopped work because of a series of violent and discriminatory incidents. Several months after their strike ended, they submitted a document to the UMW and the company explaining their actions and enumerating a number of grievances. Entitled "Report of Committee Appointed By Employees of the Pittsburgh Coal Company," and bearing the subheading of "Colored Coal Miners in the Employ of the Foregoing Company Brutally Beaten and Robbed," the paper opened by stating that the "activities of men employed by the Coal Company . . . known as [the] Coal and Iron Police . . . have terrorized and intimidated the colored people and have transgressed upon their rights to such a degree that great concern is felt in some quarters for their future welfare, and it is quite possible that in the very near future they will be compelled to band together for mutual protection."²⁷¹

They explained the types of assaults that had recently occurred against them and their families while living in their "patch" (a small company-owned village). "It is common practice by these Company Policemen," they wrote, "to enter the home of the colored man without regard to the legal rights of its occupants; in many instances . . . homes were entered and its occupants brutally beaten." The men continued by declaring that, "on one occasion . . . three Coal and Iron Policemen had entered the home of a colored miner over the protest of both him and his wife, and both of them were brutally beaten and the woman was dragged to the Coal Company's jail and kept there for forty-eight hours, despite the fact she had left a four-months' old baby in the house who neighbors had to care for during the mother's incarceration."²⁷²

There occurred one incident in particular that ultimately led these miners to organize and mount a strike against the company. "We were compelled at Montour Mine No.1 to band together for mutual protection," they announced, "and on the 12th day of September, 1927, we refused to continue working under these terrible conditions, and to secure redress for the brutal acts of three Coal and Iron Policemen who entered the home of a colored coal miner and beat up to four men

with their blackjacks, and two women were also severely injured during this attack." The miners insisted the "demonstration" would not "terminate until Mr. Louder, of the Pittsburgh Coal Company, agreed to discharge the three members of his police force." Louder conceded to their demands, but it was a shallow victory; "instead of discharging them as promised, they were removed to other properties of the Coal Company, to again carry on their nefarious work."²⁷³

The protest these men staged consisted of much more than an attack upon the acts of violence made against them; it was also a stinging rebuke of the company's policies against them as workers and residents of the patch. They complained about "the systematic robbery of the colored coal miner," which occurred in part because "the Foreman makes a common practice of promising payment for work performed at the mine, promises which are rarely fulfilled." The protestors further alleged, "when the coal miner has loaded passes over the tippie, he is not given credit for the full amount loaded, as evidenced by the fact that Montour Mine No. 1, covering a period of production at this mine, there is a discrepancy between the amount for which the coal miner was paid, and the amount shown, which went out in railroad cars."²⁷⁴

They complained about the company stores. "We find conditions there such that it is hard to believe the colored coal miner is compelled to pay, in some instances, \$6.00 for a pair of shoes- which can be bought in the City of Pittsburgh for \$2.98 . . . the same is true of nearly all the dry goods sold in these stores." The men concluded their complaint by stating, "the boarding houses at Montour Mine No. 1 are subject to an espionage system which would make the Kaiser seem like a piker, and all conversation that takes place is carefully checked so that the colored man lives in constant fear of being called to account for any careless remarks he may have made." To these allegations, the men offered "solutions" they believed would help to "eventually improve conditions at the aforesaid mentioned properties":

FIRST. We urge all colored coal miners to group together at Montour Mine No. 1 and form a local Union of their own for the purpose of mutual protection.

"SECOND. Men will pass among you, either in the home or in the mine, for the purpose of bringing about this condition.

"THIRD. We have assurances from hundreds of our fellow-workers that if the Coal and Iron Police for the Coal Company interfere with this program, that another demonstration, such as that practiced September 12th, will immediately take place."²⁷⁵

The document was signed by members of the Colored Committee of Non-Union Miners at Montour Mine Number 1, including W. J. Britt, chairman, W. Spears, W. Martin, Joseph David Catus, Robert Reed, and John Hamilton.

Despite the protest, the Coal and Iron Police continued its ruthless campaigns targeting African American miners. One year later, in the October 26, 1929, edition of the *Pittsburgh Courier*, an article headlined "Coal, Iron Police Shoot Down Miner," relates the story of African American coal miner, William Young, who was shot and killed at the Montour Mine, Number 1. The episode unfolded as a group of miners protested the arrest of one of their comrades, Howard Childers, who was apprehended for "driving under the influence of liquor" and taken from "his hut" to "Policeman Donaldson's" house. The miners, three-hundred strong, congregated outside Donaldson's home asking that Young be set free as they argued he committed no crime. They were asked to disperse by a Sergeant Akers and a Private Lucas. While the company declared that Young attacked Lucas, forcing the private to shoot the miner, the African American miners painted a different story. "Young was attacked by Lucas and knocked to the ground," they alleged, and the "Coal and Iron Police . . . shot Young outright."²⁷⁶

By the late 1930s, African American coal patch towns were found throughout much of western and southwestern Pennsylvania, and both professional and avocational historians can find clues to their composition in the historical record. One resource is a brochure held by the Heinz History Center entitled "Activities Month Celebration: Pittsburgh Coal Company Villages From May 13th to June 17th Nineteen Hundred and Thirty-Nine." The document must be understood in terms of its author, the personnel department of the Pittsburgh Coal Company, which attempted to highlight the good relations it fostered with its African American employees. The brochure also provides valuable insight into the inner workings of these African American communities and the institutions which thrived there. In the foreword to the pamphlet it was stated, therefore, that "within the past few years" the company had made an effort to "promote a



Portrait of an African American demolition worker wearing his overalls, goggles and hardhat, 1951. Photo from Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh. Used with permission.

definite industrial, social and civic program with [its] Negro employees and families living in the numerous villages of the company." Continuing in this same paternalistic fashion, the company asserted its belief that through "the need for creative use of leisure, the development of character and skills, the sponsorship of better individual and community health," and "the prevention of anti-social behavior," the company could control the "problems of mining communities as urban centers."²⁷⁷

Included in the foreword are photographs of the company's personnel director, C. A. McDowell, and an African American social worker, William S. Howell, most likely to give credibility to the company's philosophy. In the

pages that follow, however, are a number of independent groups and institutions that had existed regardless of the company's agenda. As a historical document, the narrative best works as a social investigation into the lives of African American mineworkers and their families. Of the eighteen villages listed, the pamphlet enumerated the "Number of baseball teams" at 11; the "Number of mushball teams" at 8; the "Number of basketball teams" at 2; the "Number of children's Game rooms" at 5; the "Number of recreation leaders" at 9; and the "Number of leisure time classes" at 12. Under "Interest in Religious Activities," the "Number of Churches" was 21, and the "Number of Church auxiliaries," was 72. It estimated that the "Total Church membership" stood at 836.²⁷⁸

The sponsors of the various activities show, besides active women's and men's social and political clubs in coal patch towns, the undeniable presence of the Baptist church. There was a strong connection between the church and the individuals, who brought their preference to live and worship as Baptists to the region. The document also provides information about recreational pursuits, choral and instrumental groups, schools in the region, libraries, and the condition of company housing, all of which were photographed to document the "progress" among African American miners. The document contains a list of more than 1,000 names which could aid in composing genealogies and the reconstruction of significant historical events.²⁷⁹

During the interviews for this study, Dorris Keane and Margaret Marsh, of Washington, Washington County, confirmed the existence of a number of mining operations and their African American workforce and patches. Keane told of four sites in particular, Manifold Mine, Mariana Mine, Tylerdale Mine, and Midland Mine. Manifold and Tylerdale were adjacent to the Washington region, and Midland, mentioned in the 1939 Pittsburgh Coal Company pamphlet, was located at Houston, between Canonsburg and Washington. "Tylerdale didn't have a lot of the mining houses and things," Keane remembered. "They just, you know, they went to work there but they didn't have the regular mining company houses." She said this was because many of the workers at the Tylerdale mines simply "were from Washington . . . and they traveled to the mines." However, in her recollections of Midland Mine, she said it "had the mining houses and the company store."²⁸⁰

It would be regrettable if one anecdote concerning African Americans in the coal industry was neglected because it illustrates that it was not only in the realm of mining that one could make an impact as an individual of African descent. The story is that of George M. Johnson, whose patented coal mining safety device for the stoppage of mine cars was issued on December 4, 1917. Johnson's plant for manufacturing this and other inventions for the coal industry was located in Jeanette. In October 1923, it burned to the ground in what was called a "suspicious" fire.

In the *Pittsburgh Courier's* article entitled "\$75,000 Blaze Wrecks G. M. Johnson Manufacturing Plant; Owned by Race Man," the writer noted, "Fire, said to be of undetermined origin, destroyed the Geo. M. Johnson Manufacturing Company Plant, at Fourth and Patton Streets, Jeanette, Pa., shortly after midnight last Thursday night." The article continued, "The company manufactures mine safety devices which have been recognized by leading mine experts throughout the country as the best on the market, and if they had been installed in the Dolomite mine in Alabama, the frightful toll of life would have been avoided." Johnson, a Southern migrant and a native of Roanoke, Virginia, had for years been a "master mechanic" for the Pittsburgh Coal Company "prior to the invention and development of the seventeen different safety devices, which he has covered with over 45 patents. . . . The Johnson devices are now in use on more than a thousand coal mines in all parts of the country."

The Johnsons survived and remained in Jeanette for at least another decade. In 1931, Johnson led the charge in a series of articles he wrote for the *Pittsburgh Courier* urging a ban on the use of the word "Negro." In its place, he recommended the term "Colored American," because he believed "Negro" was defined by whites in animalistic and derogatory terms. Johnson spent much of the 1930s as a general manager for the Fort Pitt Mine Equipment Company, where he continued to invent and acquire patents for mine safety devices.²⁸¹

Refractories

Turning attention next to the brick and glass industries in Pennsylvania and to the numerous refractories that had, with perhaps the greatest frequency, existed in the central part of the Commonwealth, it becomes apparent that African American laborers were often employed in this area of manufacture during much of the 20th century. However, there is one community in particular that is essentially the model to study when looking at the African American working experience in the brickyards: Mt. Union, Huntingdon County.

The three main refractors in Mt. Union, all of which had been established during the early 20th century, were the Mt. Union Refractories Company, established in 1911 (and which later changed its name to North American Refractories); the Mt. Union Silica Brick Company, founded in 1901 (and which later became known as the General Refractories Company); and the W. H. Haws Company, formed in 1900 (and which later emerged as the Harbison-Walker Refractories Company). "The industry is based on silica," explained R. Cummins McNitt, "which is in ganister rock, found in the mountains around Mt. Union. Jack's Mountain has been the largest source of silica for the industries. Silica brick was and is used to line the kilns in the production of steel. Mt. Union became the world's largest producer of silica brick, and with this industry the town's size grew."²⁸²

Many of the individuals registered in the community during the canvassing for the 1910 federal census, comprised mostly of the first wave of the new Southern migrants, were brickyard

workers. The census listed individuals such as Turner Douglass, age 30, an African American male who migrated from Virginia and worked at the "Brick Yards." Douglass lived on Jefferson Street in the First Ward of Mt. Union, Huntingdon County, with his wife Mary, age 28, and their daughter Catherine, age 1½. Clarence Terrelle, 24, who with his wife Clara, 32, also lived on Jefferson Street, was listed as a "Brick Worker."²⁸³

The highest concentration of African American families, however, lived on Ganister Hill in Mt. Union's Second Ward, situated on a high cliff-like area overlooking the Harbison-Walker Brick Yards. Brick workers, such as James Branch, age 40, who had recently relocated to the community from Virginia, lived with his wife Emma and their four daughters on Ganister Hill. Four boarders lived with the Branch family, all of whom were listed as employees of the "Brick Works." They are recorded in the census as Harry Johnson and James Dietrich, from Maryland, and Thomas Woodburn and John Johnson, first generation Pennsylvanians. James Crasly, listed as one of the brick yard workers, lived on Ganister Hill with his wife Etta and their boarder, a minister from Virginia, William Spears. Ganister Hill was also the residence, in 1910, of several other families who worked in the brick yards, including Calvin Jackson and his family who came from Virginia and George Lewis and his wife and children, all of whom were born in Pennsylvania. However, not all the African Americans who lived on Ganister Hill in 1910 were brickyard workers; George Smith, age 45, was a fireman, and his son Herbert, 24, worked at a barbershop. In fact, the majority of the residents who had lived on the hill at the time were not African American but individuals of Russian, Hungarian, and Italian descent.²⁸⁴

When comparing the census of 1910 to the census of 1920, it's readily apparent that Mt. Union's African American population increased substantially, with virtually all of its new residents consisting of migrants from the South in search of a better way of life. Mt. Union's black population rose to more than four hundred individuals by 1920. Most of these individuals lived in Ganister Hill, which grew in size along with the growth of the Harbison-Walker plant; "The Flat," the primary African American business, residential, and church district; or Kistler, a company town across the Juniata River from the North American Refractory plant which commissioned its construction.²⁸⁵

Ganister Hill

Ganister Hill counted among its population more than one hundred black brick workers and their families, including Lamberth Brumpton, from North Carolina and owner of a boarding house that accommodated 13 men, who worked at the brickyards as either moulders or wheelers; Albert Green, from North Carolina, a moulder who lived with his wife Helen and four male roomers, all of whom worked at the refractory; Jacob Boston from Virginia, a laborer at the brickyard, who lived with his wife Ruth and two roomers, both of whom were employed at the refractory; former Virginians Garfield King, Henry Lowry, Charles Bell, William Gilland, George Scott, and William Brook and their families; Jacob Gaston, Henry Carter and Julius Clayton, all brick

workers from Georgia; and William Battly and Sylvester Holland from Maryland, two refractory workers who resided with their families.²⁸⁶

“The Flat”

Living at “The Flat,” the location of the Bethel AME Church (1917) and Mt. Hope Baptist Church (1918), were Charles F. Adams, D. B. Brown, and Isaiah James, all from South Carolina, living with their families on Shaver Street; John F. Dawson from North Carolina; Henry Malony, David H. Berry, Lomis Washington, and William Adams from South Carolina, and George Bailey and Raymond Harrison from Virginia, who with their families all lived on Division Street; Halbert Bell and Scott Redd from Virginia, and Earnest Jenkins, Chester Miller, and Oliver Williams from South Carolina, who lived on North Jefferson Street; Walter and Frank Bundy, from Virginia, who lived on Chestnut Street; and Samuel Williams from South Carolina, who with James Brown and Eugene Lewis from Virginia lived with their families on Poplar Street.²⁸⁷

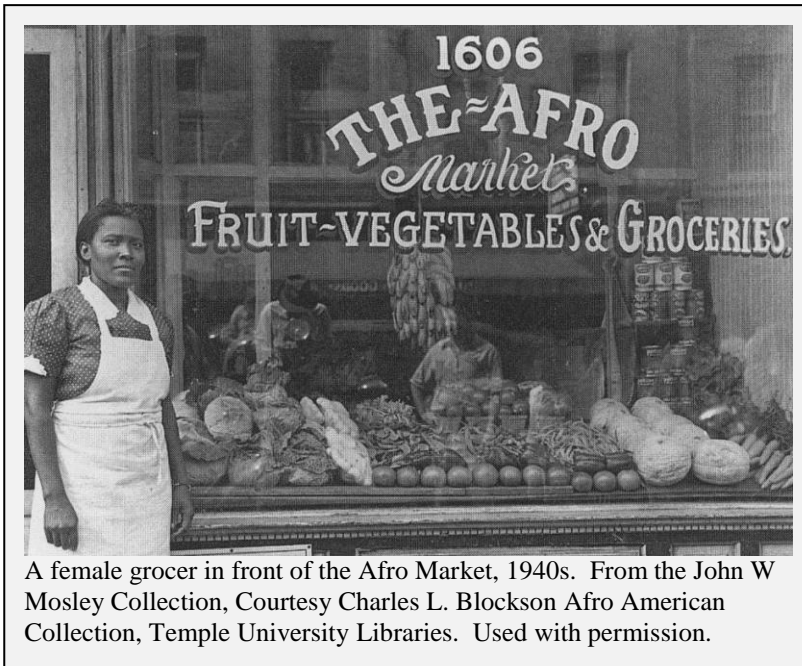
Kistler

In 1920, a significant percentage of black families lived in Kistler, an unusual company town built with lofty egalitarian goals, intended to house workers who worked for the North American Refractory Company, located directly across the Juniata River. Margaret Crawford, in her 1995 work entitled *Building the Working Man's Paradise: The Design of American Company Towns*, offered a description of Kistler. “According to a survey made by the Harvard Social Museum in 1917,” Crawford wrote,

the Kistler houses were the cheapest industrial housing in the country, with the exception of unimproved mining camp houses without sanitation or electricity. Although small-20 x 28 feet-each had from five to eight rooms with a full bathroom, electricity, and a small furnace. Well-built, the wood-frame houses had full basements, and were finished with clapboard or shingles and a durable roof and porch. Rents ranged from 10 to 13 dollars a month, 20 to 25 percent of the brickworkers' monthly wages.²⁸⁸

Crawford also took note of the attempt to promote utopian ideals based upon fair treatment of individuals, regardless of class or race. “Ethnicity raised other design issues,” she wrote. “Kistler's new residents, recruited from eastern cities and rural areas in South Carolina and Virginia, were ethnically diverse. Eastern Europeans were the largest group, followed by Italians, Irish, and a sizeable number of southern blacks.” Nolen saw the community as a form of Americanization: “The population being so largely foreign in its make-up, there is a distinct

necessity for a lead to be given in the direction of Americanism-the provision of something tangible, in the form of good living conditions-more nearly express the ideals of this country."²⁸⁹



A female grocer in front of the Afro Market, 1940s. From the John W Mosley Collection, Courtesy Charles L. Blockson Afro American Collection, Temple University Libraries. Used with permission.

Regardless of the intentions, however, Crawford maintained that there was still discrimination based on race. "Black workers and their families, relegated to two blocks in the central housing area, were the only segregated group," she wrote. "Although they occupied the same style houses as other workers, without room to expand, these two streets became overcrowded and living conditions deteriorated." She also contended, "As black workers continued to arrive, they had to board with other

black families, with as many as six boarders crowded into a single house. The lack of housing forced many blacks to leave their families behind in the South."²⁹⁰

In the 1920 census, Kistler, simply listed as "Enumeration District Number 89," was identified as being located in Mt. Union, and was home to several African American families and single men, totaling eighteen residents. The Morris family, headed by G. J Morris, a moulder at the brickyards, consisted of G. J., his wife Besse, and their daughters Helen, Dorothy, Jeane, Margaret, Josephine, Ruth, and J. L. Residents also included Joseph Solomon, his wife Nancy and their daughter Wilda, all from South Carolina; moulders James Black and Julius Johnson, both single and from South Carolina; Farmer and Kate Taylor, from South Carolina; and Jesse and Lizzie Ringer, from Virginia.²⁹¹

By 1930, the number of African Americans in Kistler nearly quadrupled, to a total of 72 individuals. (Kistler at the time was designated a borough, and assigned to Mifflin County instead of Huntingdon County.) Among many of the new residents who relocated to Kistler between 1920 and 1930 were Samuel Brandon, a brickyard laborer from Virginia who lived with his wife Susie and their six children; Thomas and Mary Alexander, from South Carolina, who lived with their five children; John and Dorothea Kelton, from Virginia, and their two sons; Thomas Thaxton and his wife Missouri, from North Carolina, who lived with their six children and one boarder, Fred McCain; James and Mamie Hawlet, and their daughter Mabel, from

Virginia, North Carolina, and Pennsylvania, respectively; and Jack Holiday and his wife Marie, from Virginia.²⁹²

Extensive networks of African American organizations and societies— sewing clubs, a choral group, and a baseball team, the Kistler Colored Giants— thrived in the community. Numerous examples of these groups exist in the photographic record as well as the black press, and it is important to elaborate on some of these findings for they illustrate the vibrancy of the lives of those who worked and lived at Kistler. The *Pittsburgh Courier* mentioned Kistler first in 1923 under the heading of Mt. Union: "Miss Lela Lewis, of 'Kistler,' and Mark Brown motored to Huntingdon, Pa., Saturday, October 27, and were quietly married." On a more social-gathering level, the *Courier* of June 14, 1930, noted, "The Helping Hand Club met at the home of Mrs. Missouri Theater, Kistler, Pa." In a piece that highlighted the fact that African Americans in Kistler had to travel to Mt. Union to the Baptist, AME or the COGI churches to worship, the edition of August 2, 1930, reported, "The Kistler Glee Club sang Sunday afternoon at Bethel AME Church." On December 16, 1939, an article on Mt. Union mentioned. "The Chit Chat Club spent a lovely evening Saturday playing cards, dancing, etc., at their hall in Kistler, Pa."²⁹³

Shanty Town

In addition to uncovering information about work in the brickyards of Mt. Union and life in settlements and company towns, interviews conducted with individuals in Mt. Union provided additional insight. Bernie Chatman commented on another, lesser investigated area of the community that many African American migrants who worked at the adjacent General Refractories Company eventually settled upon, built their houses, set up gardens, and raised hogs and chickens: Shanty Town. "Well, from the pictures I have . . . of Shantytown," Chatman said, "you can see cars parked, horses, carriages, my sisters on the carriage with my mom in the back with the Model T Ford. It was a big operation. It was gardens, because we picked and planted all our own food and gardening and stuff like that. And see, my parents lived in a shanty over here, and most of the main house was over here, a big house with a long porch . . . twenty people could have lived in that house."²⁹⁴

Chatman recalled that most of the area's residents came from either South Boston, Virginia, or Salida, South Carolina. For the most part, they worshiped at the Mount Hope Baptist Church. For entertainment during the 1930s and 1940s, Chatman remembered that men would "'hang out' on their porches 'tell[ing] stories . . . play[ing] guitars and banjos . . . sing[ing] and drink[ing] hard liquor." He also recollected, "the South Boston people migrated here to work the brickyards based on the information they received from the Rodgers and the Shantytown folk, and the Kistler folk were Chathams bringing people in from the Salida, South Carolina, area. And that was the migration from the South to the North."²⁹⁵

In an interview conducted with Alan Rogers, he remembered that Mt. Union's brickyards were dangerous and that African American individuals were more prone to acquiring silicosis because they worked in the most grueling, dirtiest, and least ventilated areas. Rogers recalled that similar to the working experience in the steel industry, when African Americans entered the workforce of the brickyards, "it takes so long to get in, and then it takes so long to get equal pay, and then when you get in and get decent pay, they give you the job that's going to kill you. . . . Killed a lot of people, many young guys, man, getting sick of the same thing."²⁹⁶

Rogers's nephew, Lowell Rogers, summarized the experience of working in the brickyards from the 1940s through the 1970s.

I worked in Harbison-Walker. And the environment when you worked- when you get a job you're under a lot of racial pressure. . . . When the people come from the south to this [town they found that] the brick job is mostly hard labor. . . . Once the heavy equipment come in, they didn't need the black men no more. Because you were lifting them wheelbarrows with tons. You got to learn to balance. You know-basically they would put you on the hard jobs. Very few black men in that brickyard worked the easy jobs. It was all hard labor. Then once the equipment come in, they eliminate the workers. And that's the basics of what I've seen of me working out through this community of these jobs. Then it's like hell trying to get one. Then once you got a job it's like hell trying to keep it.²⁹⁷

The growth of the industrial work force fostered the development of other businesses providing goods and services to the local black community. By studying examples from the 1910 Negro Business Directory and Lewis James Carter Jr.'s 1936 survey of African American industries and businesses in Pennsylvania, researchers are able to construct a story of the black working experience that is as complex as it is diverse. In Pittsburgh in 1910, many businesses and enterprises were owned by African Americans, including:

- Barbers, 20
- restaurants and hotels, 25
- groceries, poultry, etc., 10
- tailors, 10
- pool rooms, 10
- saloons and cafes, 5
- printers, 5
- pharmacies, 5
- undertakers and livery, 4

- confectioners and bakeries, 3
- caterers, 3
- contractors and builders, 1
- contractors for hauling, 10
- carters, hucksters, draymen, 30
- fish and game dealers, 2
- bootblack parlors, 20
- haberdasher, 1
- hair stores, 5²⁹⁸

In addition, a number of individuals were noted as exerting a significant impact in the area of business, including (but not limited to): Thomas H. Harrison, who "conducts the largest newspaper, periodical and stationary store of any colored man in the state"; Nathan T. Vealer, who had "in 1893 established a general store at what is now known as East Pittsburgh, and for ten years was the postmaster of that section," in addition to operating "an extensive coal and feed business"; R. E. Frazier, whose "business enterprises are located in the east end and consist of a barber shop, 4 chairs, pool and billiard room, 6 tables, and a well-equipped restaurant upon the same street"; and Madame C. J. Walker, who "established a reputation for her hair grower and pressing oil that extends throughout the country."²⁹⁹

In Philadelphia, in 1910, the directory identified a brisk business in insurance and publishing:

There are five insurance companies and twenty newspapers, mostly weekly: these are: Chat, Christian banner, Christian Recorder, Citizen, Church Guide, Church Review, Constitution, Home Extension, Cooks' and Waiters' Journal, Odd Fellows' Journal, Philadelphia Courant, Philadelphia Tribune, The Prophet, The Pilot, Public Record, Retrospective View, Solid Rock Herald, the Missionary Seer, Volunteer, Weekly Messenger, and McGirt's Monthly Magazine.³⁰⁰

"Workers were thus divided" as "Agricultural pursuits, 214; professional service, 585; domestic and personal service, 26, 646; trade and transportation, 3,727; manufacturing and mechanical pursuits, 3,061." The directory also recorded "16 lawyers, 11 dentists, 2 druggists, 30 physicians, 6 artists, 4 chiropractists," and "2 occultists," as well as "50 public school teachers" and "4 private school teachers."³⁰¹

In the trades, shop keeping, and restaurant industry, the directory identified 115 barbers, 82 caterers, 80 restaurateurs, 70 policemen, 48 grocers, and 40 tobacco dealers. Emphasizing the accomplishments of two Philadelphia businessmen in particular, the directory lauded the career

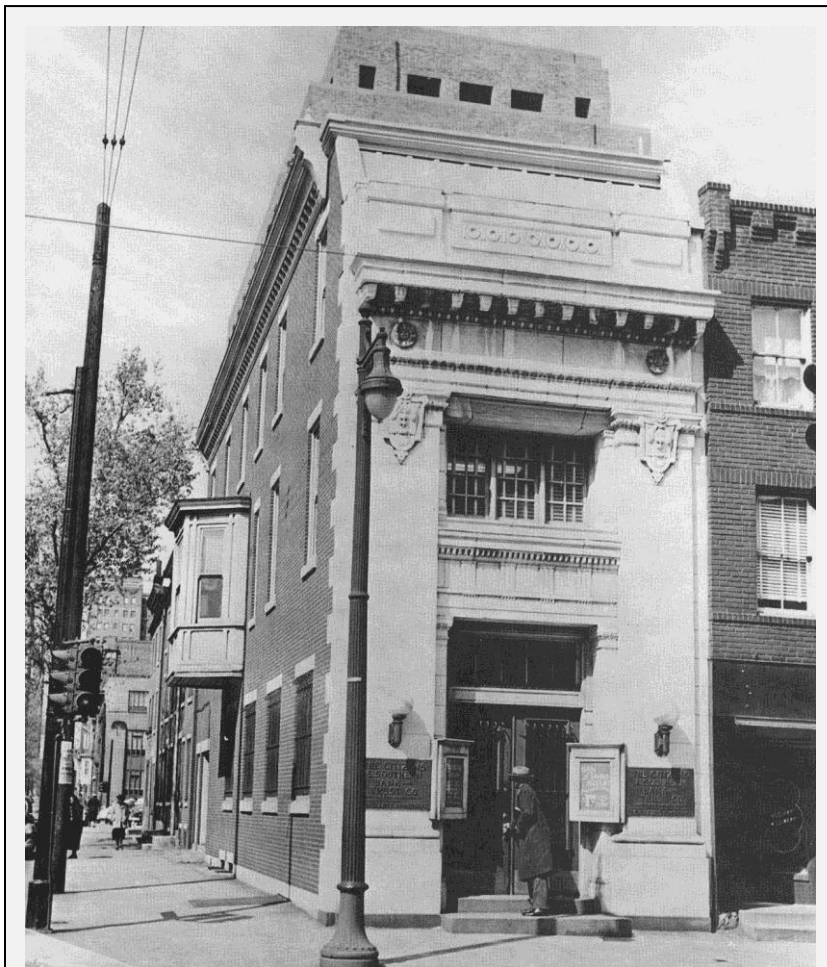
of Amos Scott, "one of the best known hotel men in Pennsylvania," who was the proprietor of the Hotel Scott, at Eleventh and Spruce streets, and Albert S. Jones, who ran "the oldest hotel kept by a Negro in the State of Pennsylvania," the Roadside Hotel. The hotel, located at 520 South Fifteenth Street, had been in business for more than twenty years.³⁰²

In other sections of the Commonwealth, there is a familiar breakdown of African American occupational opportunities, although each community had its own variations in available work. In Oil City, Venango County, the population of African Americans numbered 170 in 1910, and that the "General Employment" was in "Domestic and Hotel Services, janitors, chauffeurs, teamsters, and coachmen."³⁰³

Among the "Business enterprises listed" in York, York County, were "barber shops, 13; billiard and pool rooms, 2; café, 1; hair dressers and manicuring, 4; caterer, 2; phosphate dealer, 1; hauling and draying, 5; clerks, 1; boarding and lodging, 2; restaurants, 1; manufacturing hair tonic, 1."

In Bedford, the occupations were identified as "Hotel service and common labor" (related, in part, to the seasonal migrant laborers who worked at the Bedford Springs Resort and had stayed in the community), although there was also recorded "ten negroes in the county who own small farms, at an assessed valuation of \$6,700," and it was mentioned that "A peanut factory, owned by Mr. Henry Heckerman, employs nineteen negro girls."

In Altoona, Blair County, a



Major Richard Robert Wright Sr., founder and president of Citizen and Southern Bank and Trust Company, enters the branch at 19th and South Streets, 1940's. Founded in 1921, it was the third and most successful Black bank in Philadelphia. From the John W Mosley Collection, Courtesy Charles L. Blockson Afro American Collection, Temple University Libraries. Used with permission.

similar story to the one in Bedford comes to light, where it was perhaps stated sarcastically that most of the "industrial employment" for African Americans occurred in "Hotel and Domestic Service" because "the great Pennsylvania railway Shops at Altoona, which employ several thousand men, have no Negroes in their service whatsoever."³⁰⁴

George S. Smith, "the only Negro resident" in Cambridge Springs, Crawford County, had purchased three buildings in 1904, "remodeling" them "at a cost of \$6,500." Smith, who "formerly conducted the fish and oyster business in Warren," maintained the upper floors as guest rooms for travelers, and leased spaces in the lower floors to several individuals, including the "leading confectioner of the town." Smith ran his own Café Royal in the building. He was assisted in his business by his wife, "an accomplished manicurist and chiropodist" noted for "manufacturing many of her own remedies and commanding a splendid trade."³⁰⁵

Carter's survey illustrates that along with the Great Migration and the boom in many industries, additional opportunities opened up for both men's and women's employment. One finding that Carter discovered in his survey concerning the change in African American employment patterns from 1910 to 1930 was significant. "It was to be expected," Carter wrote, "with the tremendous increase in the colored population within the state during the past twenty years that the number of colored men in public service employments should have increased at the same time. The negro mail carriers, policemen, clerks, and other public officers becomes more in evidence as the colored population swells. Few, indeed, are the towns with any considerable colored population where there is not one colored policeman and a mail carrier."³⁰⁶

Carter expounded on the changing state of African American white collar employment, asserting that with the Great Migration, "Physicians, lawyers, teachers, dentists, and other professional persons could be counted among these southerners coming to Pennsylvania." That the railroad industry rarely allowed African Americans in its mechanical trades, prompted Carter to write, "Although the exclusion policy of the Railroad Brotherhoods keeps the black worker from the more highly paid positions on the railroads of Pennsylvania, the importance of the negroes in the lesser paying jobs is considerable. Section gang hands, porters on trains and in the stations, conductors' helpers are some of the jobs in which colored men feature quite prominently."³⁰⁷

Carter examined women's work, and believed that although some jobs in the mechanical trades had opened up during World War I, when the men returned home, women were "forced back into the traditional domestic and personal service." By 1930, "87.5 percent of the 65, 952 negro women gainfully employed" were categorized as domestics. In the mechanical field, he determined that "four-fifths of all the negro women in the state so employed," work in the region surrounding Philadelphia. There occurred what Carter alluded to as "a phenomenal increase of 2,809 percent" of women working in the transportation industry. "Colored women railroad workers are almost one hundred percent organized in Philadelphia." Moreover, he asserted that

the women who had worked "at the Arsenal in Philadelphia, receive the benefits of collective bargaining through the Federal Employees Union." Carter concluded that African American women were not only making great strides in the areas of teaching in the numerous black schools and colleges, but also in the "mixed schools within the eastern part of the state."³⁰⁸

Carter did take notice of the "high labor turnover" among African American workers, and reiterated the common perception that while often "being the last employed, it was but natural that he be the first dismissed, when it came to a matter of cutting labor forces." This was not the case because there were a number of job areas in which foreign-born immigrants were just as, or almost as likely, to be laid off. Of the workforce which had been laid off by, or changed jobs in the clay, glass, and brick industry between 1920 and 1930, 18.7% were African Americans, 20.40 percent were foreign-born immigrants, and only 5.99 percent were "American-Born."³⁰⁹

In the leather and rubber industries, many more foreign-born immigrants (33.20 percent) had turned over as opposed to African Americans (13.10 percent). It must be taken into consideration, however, that the industry was particularly toxic and dangerous, and these immigrants may have been moving on to better paying jobs and better working conditions.³¹⁰

In the textiles, metals, and mining, and quarrying industries many more African American laborers were the first to feel the pinch, as in the former 22.06 percent of them had changed jobs, as opposed to 11.70 for immigrants, and 7.55 percent for "American-born" (ie, white). In metals (steel and tin), it was a similar picture, as 21.08 percent of African Americans were either laid off or changed jobs, with 15.07 percent of immigrants, and 7.04 percent native whites.³¹¹

In Pennsylvania's mines and quarries, 18.80 percent of African American jobs had been eliminated, along with 10.40 percent foreign-born, and only 2.5 percent "American-Born." Carter explained some of this phenomenon in terms of the shifting from one job to another when looking for better employment, such as when the "maintenance and way gangs" in the eastern part of Pennsylvania left for the steel mills for better money, or perhaps vice versa, if the worker was laid off by a steel plant. Yet he nevertheless contended that much of the fluctuation in the working experience of African American men, regardless of economic variables, was due at least in part to the business owner, as "much of it must be born by those responsible for the difference in the treatment of the black and white worker."³¹²

Civilian Conservation Corps

During the mid-1930s, many young African American males were unemployed and shared the same status as many White American workers who, suffering the effects of the Great Depression, turned to the newly created Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) for employment. The CCC was one of the initial and most successful programs implemented under Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal. According to Joseph M. Speakman, author of *At Work in Penn's Woods: The Civilian*

Conservation Corps in Pennsylvania, "before it was shut down in the summer of 1942, the Corps recruited more than two and one half million unemployed young men and placed them in army-run residential camps in mostly rural locations to work on natural properties conservation."³¹³

In January 1935, more than a year after the launch of the CCC, the *Pittsburgh Courier* ran an article about Pennsylvania's segregated CCC camps entitled "Race Gets Share of CCC Jobs: Penna. Has 3,485 Workers." The article noted, "Over a hundred of the state's cities and towns are represented by these former colored residents in the 15 colored camps in Pennsylvania. The greater number of these enrollees come from the following cities: Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Harrisburg, Scranton, Chester, Johnstown, Altoona, Lehigh, Wilkes-Barre, Bethlehem, Williamsport, McKeesport, York, Gettysburg, Waynesburg, Greensburg, Pottsville, Lancaster, Reading, Danville, Middleburg, and Lebanon." In addition, the article emphasized, "Pennsylvania has two ranking colored U.S. reserve Officers on active duty at CCC camps within the state. Captain James F. Howard is the chaplain assigned to CCC Company 2314 at Kane, Pa., and First Lieutenant William B. Marsh is the other colored chaplain stationed at CCC Company 1355, Gettysburg, Pa."³¹⁴

The story also mentioned "Eleven colored educational advisers, who are all college graduates, are also on active duty at CCC Camps in Pennsylvania. They are: Charles H. Clarke, Company 2336, Austin; Theodore H. Thompson, Company 321, Emporium; Clarence J. Grinnell, Company 361, Beaver Springs; Reuben R. Webb, Company 315 Medix Run (recently dedicated Camp Young in honor of the late Colonel Charles Young of the Tenth Cavalry, U.S. Army); Charles E. Brown, Company 314 Mt. Union; Oscar Pindle, Company 303, Benazette; Rushton C. Long, Company 336 and George W. Williams, Company 316; J.T. Carter, Company 2314 Kane; Harvey Fleishmon, Company 212 Westford and Walter H. English, Company 2317, Chaneyville, Pa."³¹⁵

The Web site of the [Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Properties](#) hosts an archive of photographs and original documents summarizing each camp's mission and activities. The images and records offer at least one perspective about the working experiences of the recruits, as well as their social, religious, and recreational activities. The rosters typically contain up to 150 names of the camp members, as well as their city of origin, providing researchers with one avenue to potentially track their lives. The roster for Camp Kane, in McKean County, recorded men mostly from Pittsburgh and Philadelphia, but also from Atlas, Steelton, Braddock, York, Aliquippa, and Duquesne. In a summary of both the work and life at the camp, it was noted that Chaplain Howard "organized a singing group that traveled with him when he conducted religious services at Colored Camps." The synopsis mentioned the many actions that the workers had undertaken in 1935 and 1936, among them "heroic work in keeping open snow-drifted roads during the severe winter of 1935-36," the rebuilding of "five miles of telephone lines," and the construction of "a stone base on Seven Mile Road from Lamont to the

Experimental Station." Hard labor was the norm at the camp, as the men also carried out the "quarrying, cutting, and hauling" of "1200 yards of stone from Twin Lakes Dam stone cut masonry spillway."³¹⁶



Ralph Elwood Brock, First African American graduate of the Penn State Forestry Academy, 1902. Photo from Temple University, Blockson Archives. Used with permission.

There was, however, mention of a cultural life: "since its organization, the glee club and quartet have had the pleasure of serving citizens in Kane, James City, and Bradford, Pa., as well as Olean, New York. On one occasion, the quartet broadcast from Station WHDL, Olean, N.Y., as guests on a program sponsored by the Ministerial Alliance." Recreational activities included a baseball team and sports clubs. "The various athletic teams have established records

of which the camp is justly proud," the pamphlet explained. It also took note that, "Members of the Radio Club," had "erected a building, complete in every detail, which housed the radio equipment and provided an operator's office as well as classroom for the radio and aviation groups."³¹⁷

Camp Emporium was also located in northwestern Pennsylvania, although it was closer to the northcentral section of Pennsylvania, at North Creek, "approximately nine miles from Emporium, Pa." During the camp's first few years, "two and a half miles of stream improvement have been completed" and "a bridge leading into the camp has been constructed." It also noted that "foot trails have been built and forest stands have been improved." There was also a discussion about battling the forces of nature: "In 1935, the enrollees worked for several days battling the forest fire which threatened McKean and Warren counties, and did commendable work in aiding to extinguish the blaze." The men also fought a fire in Elk County, during which "much valuable property was saved." The camp was in the thick of fighting the 1936 flood, and among the flood relief work the men performed in nearby communities was "clearing the debris from the streets and cellars of afflicted nearby cities, giving first aid, and aiding in a general way to rehabilitate the residents."³¹⁸

Recreational and cultural opportunities were important to the recruits. Special note was made of "wood craft work done by members of the company were on display at the Advisers' Conference," and "three enrollees received scholarships to Wilberforce and Union universities during the fall of 1936." The narrative concluded with a brief discussion of the relationship between camp and community: "The relationship of the camp and community have been cordial," as "amateur shows have been given in Emporium and the camp orchestra has been engaged to play at several clubs and civic organizations gaining quite a following in the community."³¹⁹

At Camp Benezette, located near Du Bois and the Allegheny National Forest, the "conservation of the forests was the task assigned to the company." Other than completing up to "20 miles of forest roads," the enlisted men also "planted 16 acres of Black Locust, Pine and Japanese Larch Trees, covered 443 acres of blister rust control, and 1930 acres of timber estimating." Like their comrades at Camp Emporium, they spent "a total of 630 man days" fighting fires, constructing three bridges, and maintaining a "total of seven miles of telephone line." (Incidentally, "the camp baseball team, basketball, and track teams, have participated in sports with most of the [surrounding] communities, and proved ambassadors of goodwill.")³²⁰

Not everything that took place at the segregated CCC camps or within the make-up of its institutional hierarchy was aboveboard, however. While these stories contain vivid accounts of the agency undertaken on behalf of many of the African American enlistees, they often glossed over the fact that the camps were segregated, and this point alone exemplified the racial divide that still existed at the time. These were essentially Jim Crow institutions, run by the United States Army, and the military did not begin the process of desegregating until during World War II. Many leaders in the state and national African American community voiced their concerns about the make-up of such camps, and articles such as one calling on President Roosevelt and Congress to end discrimination in the hierarchy of the CCC were commonplace in the black press.

In one such editorial, run in the *Pittsburgh Courier* on June 8, 1935, entitled "Why Are There No Race Officers at CCC Camps!," it read, "At present there is not one Negro officer on active duty with the CCC. . . . We realize that the CCC is not a military organization having been designed to relieve the unemployed situation caused by the Depression; it is however, a kind of a school for reserve officers" in which "the officer becomes familiar with company administration and with the handling of property within a military organization." The situation prompted the author to ask, "If the American Negro was 100 percent loyal throughout the war . . . is it not fair that the government of these United States should be equally loyal to him as a citizen and give the Negro officer a chance to better prepare himself?" While this changed in 1936 with the appointment of three African American officers at Gettysburg's CCC Camp, the promotions did not increase

beyond these numbers. Eventually, due to a decrease in the frequency of CCC Camps within the state by 1938, only six African American sites remained viable until the camps closed permanently in 1941.³²¹

During interviews conducted specifically for this study, one of the informants recounted stories of the men who worked at nearby CCC camps and what they meant to the local black community. Gladys Fortsen, of Mt. Union, recalled that the African American Civilian Conservation Corps Camp at Licking Creek, in Mifflin County, in operation from 1933 to 1936, cleared a great deal of land for the Appalachian Trail. She remembered the men who worked at the camp (located several miles outside of Mt. Union) "would come into town and go to our church." Fortsen also commented that they would come into the churches ". . . and they would have, have a quartet. And, and there was a man out there, and his name was Professor Johnson. I think he was out there- [he] had something to do with the singing part. And he would bring some boys in and they would sing in the churches." Fortsen said the townsfolk called these workers "camp boys" who "would just come in on the weekends."³²²

World War II

The Second World War mobilized the American economy and its people. More than 2.5 million African American men registered for the draft and black women also volunteered in large numbers. They served with distinction, some units such as the ferocious 761st Tank Battalion, the Black Panthers, won 891 awards in 185 days of continuous battle. The 94th Infantry won 1200 Purple Hearts, 65 Silver and 65 Bronze Stars. The 600 black pilots of the famous Black

Eagles, trained at Tuskegee Institute flew 200 missions with no losses; they were renowned as



Troops leaving on a train for the war, 1942. Photo from the Chester County Historical Society. Used with permission.

escorts of white-piloted bombers and claimed more than 400 enemy aircraft. Yet for all these achievements, most African American soldiers spent the war in segregated camps doing drudgework in service and engineer units. Often it was dangerous work, in 1944 200 sailors were killed in loading munitions at a California base were killed in an explosion. At first, African American troops were not permitted in combat; only as the war continued were they gradually allowed to fight. Eventually about 5% of black troops saw combat.

On the Homefront

The boom in wartime production took several years to reach the African American labor force. Not until 1942 did the color bar in war production begin to bend. Discrimination still plagued American industries. Seventy-five per cent of defense contractors refused to hire African Americans and 15% employed them in menial jobs. By threatening a March on Washington, labor leader A. Philip Randolph forced President Roosevelt to issue Executive Order 8802, prohibiting discrimination in defense industries and establishing the Fair Employment Practices Committee to investigate cases of discrimination. But the FEPC had no enforcement powers. Some companies voluntarily complied with its orders to hire African American workers. Others, such as the railroad industry and its all-white unions of locomotive firemen and brakemen,



Unidentified African American man in his military uniform, c. 1945. Photo from LancasterHistory.org. Used with permission.

continued to bar black employment. In 1943 Roosevelt greatly strengthened FEPC with a new executive order, #9346. It required that all government contracts have a non-discrimination clause. The strengthened FEPC was a significant breakthrough for blacks and women on the job front. During the war the federal government operated airfield, shipyards, supply centers, ammunition plants and other facilities that employed millions. FEPC rules applied and supported equality of employment rights. In the private sector the FEPC was generally successful in enforcing non-discrimination in the North, it did not attempt to challenge segregation in the South, and in the border region its intervention led to hate strikes by angry white workers. In reality it was only the extreme tightness of the labor supply that opened up jobs for African Americans. Between 1940 and 1944, over one and a half million black Americans entered civilian jobs; the number of black skilled workers doubled.³²³

One significant area of study to explore when examining the working experiences of African Americans in Pennsylvania during the 20th century is the phenomena of women on the home front who worked in the military-industrial complex during World War II. Diane B. Reed has summarized the lives of these women quite cogently, when she stated in her article "Wanted: Women to Meet the Wartime Challenge!" that appeared in the Spring 1995 edition of *Pennsylvania Heritage*. Particularly interesting is the impact that the war had on African

American women. Prior to the war, black women were twice as likely to be employed outside the home as white women, but primarily in the most menial of positions, generally in domestic service," she wrote. "While the onset of the war brought increasing opportunities for women, many industries gave preference first to white women. Nevertheless, many black women were able to leave domestic service to accept jobs in war related industries. By the end of the war, eighteen percent of African American women workers were employed in factories and enjoying moderately improved wages, although many of the jobs they were ultimately able to find were at the lowest pay and status levels."³²⁴

There are many examples of this wartime trend which appear in the pages of the black press. An article published by the *Pittsburgh Courier* on September 12, 1942, documented that "Ten additional Negro girls" who were "trained by the National Youth Administration," had "been employed in the machine shop and drafting department of the Frankford Arsenal," located in Philadelphia. They were part of an "ever-increasing number" of African American women "finding their places in the war effort." One of the female interviewees for this study, Gladys Fortsen, of Mt. Union, made note of her mother's experiences in the wartime industry, recalling that her mother had worked at the Letterkenny Army Depot, Chambersburg, "for a while" in the 1940s, yet qualified her remarks that it had happened "just temporarily, during the wartime."³²⁵

With the end of the war, demobilization and the winding down of war industries, plus the expectation that white veterans would be returning to their old jobs, led to substantial layoffs of African American workers, especially in the steel and coal industries.³²⁶ But black Pennsylvanians were determined to hold on to the gains they had made. The NAACP, Urban League, and other civil rights groups launched a determined campaign to push the FEPC to investigate and correct instances of job discrimination. They also pushed for state and municipal fair employment laws. Between 1945 and 1953 11 states and 25 municipalities, including Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, and Clairton, had enacted fair employment legislation³²⁷

However, despite some gains, black Pennsylvanians slowly lost ground in the labor force in the post-war years. In 1953 the *Philadelphia Tribune* reported that in spite of the protection of fair employment legislation

The unemployment rate among nonwhites increased more than twice as much as among whites during the years 1945-1946. And when the unemployment rate reached a post-war peak in 1950 the proportion of Negroes employed in non-agricultural industries, particularly manufacturing, decreased markedly.³²⁸

Unemployment among black men in Pennsylvania in 1950 was 12.8% and among black women 9.1%. The 1950 Census revealed the gap in median income between black and white families in Pennsylvania:³²⁹

	white	non-white
Harrisburg	\$2,135	\$1416
Lancaster	\$2033	\$1329
Philadelphia	\$2429	\$1548
Pittsburgh	\$2539	\$1608
Reading	\$2093	\$1422
York	\$1931	\$1353

The 1960 Census statistics showed improvement in wages, but a persistent gap.³³⁰

	white	non-white
Philadelphia SMSA	\$6433	\$4291
Pittsburgh SMSA	\$5954	\$3863
Allegheny County	\$6173	\$3862
Delaware County	\$7350	\$4292
Philadelphia County	\$5782	\$4248

In 1953 Governor John S Fine released the results of a study undertaken by a special Industrial Race Relations Committee, which surveyed 1,229 companies, manufacturing and non-manufacturing, employing about a million workers in the Commonwealth. The report indicated that 67 percent of all Pennsylvania firms discriminated against minority groups in their employment of skilled workers, that only 10 percent of firms were “free of discrimination”, and that discrimination increased as skill level increased. It went on to make several important points:

1. job discrimination is greatest in the central and southwest regions of the state. It is least in the northeast and southeast regions. The northwest region is near the statewide average but stands closer to the less discriminatory northeast and southeast than the two heavily discriminatory regions.
2. most of the discrimination is against Negroes, although there is “significant evidence” of discrimination against Jews and other religious and nationality groups.
3. “Tradition” and “company policy” were cited most frequently as the principal reason for discrimination. In cases where a firm

showed “unfairness” against only a specific minority group, evidently such discrimination was “inadvertent.”

4. discrimination diminishes in proportion to the size of the firms, with the exception of the smallest type of firm (those with 50 employees or less).

5. Nearly three-fourths of the firms “discriminatory” are discriminating against minority group workers in their promotion or upgrading practices. More than three quarters of the discriminatory establishments that employ apprentices deny apprenticeships to minority group workers.

6. During the last five years there have been “limited changes” in hiring policies regarding minority groups. Seven percent of the establishments surveyed have adopted “more liberal hiring policies”. A “tight labor market” heavily influenced this tendency.

³³¹

The study prompted the Governor to call for passage of a statewide fair employment bill, versions of which had languished in the legislature since the 1940s. Pennsylvania did not pass a Fair Employment Practices Act until 1956.

By the end of the 1950s, it was clear that African Americans across the nation and the state of Pennsylvania were not only not gaining ground, they were falling further behind whites in employment and income. In 1950 black families in Pennsylvania made about 54 percent of the income of white families, but in 1958 they made only 51 percent of the income of white families.³³²

In 1959 the *Pittsburgh Courier* reported

The Negro worker is being more and more fully integrated into the army of the unemployed in the United States. In 1958 and in the preceding three years, the non-white unemployment rate was almost consistently more than double the white unemployment rate. The differential has been extended both in years of prosperity and years of economic decline.³³³

NAACP Secretary of Labor Herbert Hill blamed

labor unions and the inability of the National AFL-CIO Civil Rights Department to induce all unions to encourage all workers

without regard to race, creed, color, or national origin to share in the full benefits of union membership.³³⁴

However, the causes of the problem were more deeply rooted in the spatial rearrangement of American society and the restructuring of the nation's industrial economy that began in the late 1940s. As whites decamped from the cities for the booming suburbs, discriminatory real estate practices kept African Americans from also doing so. At the same time, the economy of the nation and of the Commonwealth began to feel the results of rearranging business and production patterns, as industrial and office jobs followed white flight to the suburbs, and eventually to outsourcing overseas. The result was the increasing racial polarization of the urban landscape, resulting in increasingly black cities with fewer and fewer jobs surrounded by increasingly prosperous white suburbs.³³⁵ This happened in all the industrial towns of Pennsylvania.

In 1963 the New York Times reported on the results of new US Labor Department study. The brief article succinctly summed up the disheartening trend of the post-war years:

In the years 1947-1949, the non-white unemployment rate averaged about 60 percent higher than for white workers, whereas in each year from 1954 through 1962, it was consistently twice as high.... [the study] bears out contentions by Negro leaders that members of their race face an employment crisis in the United States.

The inability of Negroes, and particularly Negro teen-agers, to find work has been cited as a principal factor in the present civil rights drive.... despite continuing movement of Negroes into higher – skilled and better-paid jobs, large gaps remain between white and non-white workers, as measured by most indicators of social and economic well-being. And in some fields movement toward closing the gaps, evident in former years, has been halted. Despite their recent gains Negroes continue to be concentrated in less-skilled jobs and are subject to longer and more frequent periods of unemployment than whites.

The number of non-whites in white collar jobs has continued to rise at two and one-half times the rate of increase for whites,. But still, in 1962, only 17 percent of all employed non-whites were in white collar occupations, compared with 47 percent of white workers. ...

Nonwhite family income climbed from 40 percent to 60 percent of white family income between 1939 and the early 1950's.. but the difference has not been narrowed since then. Since the mid-1950s... the differences in educational attainment between whites and non-whites has remained substantially unchanged... This departs from previous long-term trends toward narrowing the disadvantage of Negroes.

The unemployment rate for nonwhites, at 11 percent in 1962, stood at the third highest level in the post war period and was only slightly lower than rates recorded in the recession affected years of 1958 and 1961. Their 1962 unemployment rate was double the jobless rate for white workers. This relationship has persisted throughout the postwar period, and in fact tended to increase in the latter part of the postwar period.³³⁶

Notes

²²³ For an excellent analysis on the development of Pennsylvania's Steel Industry see Robert P. Rogers, *An Economic History of the American Steel Industry*, New York: Routledge, 2009, 8-52 and Jay Lewis Meisel's Dissertation, *The Iron and Steel Industry in Pennsylvania from 1716 to 1865*, Indiana University, 1960.

²²⁴ *Negro Survey of Pennsylvania*, Pennsylvania Department of Welfare, Harrisburg, 1928, 18-21.

²²⁵ Dennis C. Dickerson, *Out of the Crucible Black Steelworkers in Western Pennsylvania, 1875- 1980*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986, 8-15; Paul Krause, *The Battle for Homestead 1880-1892, Politics, Culture and Steel*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1992, 102-118.

²²⁶ Dennis C. Dickerson, *Out of the Crucible*, 10.

²²⁷ Dickerson, *Out of the Crucible*, 8-10; See also Joe William Trotter's *River Jordan: African-American Urban Life in the Ohio Valley*, Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1998, 69.

²²⁸ John Lucus Dennis, "A Pittsburgh Strike: Why The Colored Workmen Take Little Part in It," *New York Freeman*, August 13th, 1887; Philip Foner, *Black Workers: A Documentary History From Colonial Times to the Present*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 209-234, 220-221; See also Eliza Smith Brown, ed., *African American Historic Sites Survey of Allegheny County*, Harrisburg: PHMC, 1999, 29-30.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Paul Krause, *The Battle For Homestead 1880-1892, Politics, Culture and Steel*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1992, 346.

²³³ Wright, *The Negro in Pennsylvania*, 93, 228.

²³⁴ Peter Gottlieb, *Making Their Own Way: Southern Blacks' Migration to Pittsburgh, 1916-30*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987, 65; Pittsburgh Courier, August 30, 1912.

²³⁵ *Pittsburgh Courier*, February 16, 1924.

²³⁶ Gottlieb, *Making their Own Way*, 76.

²³⁷ Paul D. Moreno, *Black Americans and Organized Labor: A New History*, Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2006, 171-172.

²³⁸ Paul D. Moreno, *Black Americans and Organized Labor: A New History*, Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2006, 181.

²³⁹ Dickerson, *Out of the Crucible*, 135, 137.

²⁴⁰ Interview with James B. Vactor, September 17th, 2008; National Park Service, "Battle of Homestead and Carrie Furnaces 6 and 7, A Special Resource Study," September 2002; Krause, *The Battle for Homestead*, 269-329; See also Arthur Gordon Burgoyne's *The Homestead Strike of 1892*, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1979.

²⁴¹ Interview with James B. Vactor.

²⁴² *Pittsburgh Courier*, May 10, 1941, October 24, 1947.

²⁴³ Wright, *The Negro in Pennsylvania*, 93; Eugene L. DiOrio, *Lukens: Remarkable Past--Promising Future*, Coatesville, Pennsylvania: Lukens Inc., 1990.

²⁴⁴ *Pennsylvania Negro Business Directory, Illustrated, 1910: Industrial and Material Growth of The Negroes of Pennsylvania*. Harrisburg: Jas. H.W. Howard & Son, 1910, 65.

²⁴⁵ Wright, *The Negro in Pennsylvania*, 223; *The Daily Local News* (West Chester), June 13, 1912.

²⁴⁶ W.E.B. Du Bois, "The Segregated World" in *World Tomorrow*, vol. 6, no. 5, 136.

²⁴⁷ *The Daily Local News*, August 11, 1925; See also Emerson Hunsberger Lucks, *The Ku Klux Klan in Pennsylvania: A Study in Nativism*, Harrisburg: Telegraph Press, 1936 and Philip Jenkins, *Hoods and Shirts: The Extreme Right in Pennsylvania, 1925-1950*, Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1997.

²⁴⁸ *The Daily Local News*, March 6, 1919.

²⁴⁹ *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 8, 1929

²⁵⁰ *Philadelphia Tribune*, February 28, 1929.

²⁵¹ David B. Brownlee, *Louis I. Kahn: In The Realm of Architecture*, New York: Rizzoli, 2005, 30.

²⁵² Interview with Dr. Charles Butler, May 30, 2008; *Goodman et al. v. Lukens Steel Co. et al. : certiorari to the United States Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit*, United States, s.n., 1987; See also, the Casenotes Series' *Employment Discrimination: Keyed to Friedman and Strickler*, Aspen Law and Business, 2008, 27.

²⁵³ Interview with Dr. Charles Butler., May 30, 2008.

²⁵⁴ Interview with John Robinson, October 2, 2008.

²⁵⁵ Interview with James Kennedy, June 3, 2008.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁷ *Pennsylvania Negro Business Directory*, 90, 92.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 119.

²⁵⁹ Ronald L. Lewis, *Black Coal Miners in America: Race, Class, and Community Conflict 1780- 1980*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky: 1987, x.

²⁶⁰ *Warren Evening Mirror*, November 29, 1912.

²⁶¹ Wright, *the Negro in Pennsylvania*, 231; 15th Federal Census (1930), Wilkes-Barre, Districts 242 and 243.

²⁶² Interviews with J.D. and Gloria Watson, July 28, 2008.

²⁶³ Lewis, *Black Coal Miners*, 99-118; See also Lorenzo J. Green and Carter G. Woodson's *The Negro Wage Earner*, Washington D.C: Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, 1930, 259-265.

²⁶⁴ *Pittsburgh Courier*, May 27, 1911.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁶ *Pennsylvania Negro Business Directory*, 105.

²⁶⁷ *Pittsburgh Courier*, November 26, 1926.

²⁶⁸ *Pittsburgh Courier*, December 18, 1926.

²⁶⁹ *Pittsburgh Courier* April 9, 1927.

²⁷⁰ *Pittsburgh Courier*, October 31, 1925; Mark Solomon, *The Cry Was Unity: Communists and African-Americans, 1917-1936*, Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1998, 62; Philip Sheldon Foner, *The History of the Labor Movement in the United States*, Vol. 10, New York: International Publishers, 1994, 195-197; Philip Sheldon Foner, ed., *Organized Labor and the Black Worker, 1619-1793*, New York, 1974, 192.

²⁷¹ "Report of Committee Appointed By Employees of the Pittsburgh Coal Company: "Colored Coal Miners in the Employ of the Foregoing Company Brutally Beaten and Robbed," in Peter Gottlieb's "Black Miners and the 1925-28 Bituminous Coal Strike: The Colored Committee of Non-Union Miners, Montour Mine No. 1, Pittsburgh Coal Company." *Labor History* Vol. 28, no. 2. 233-241.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, 237.

²⁷³ *Ibid.* 238.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.* 239.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 240-241.

²⁷⁶ *Pittsburgh Courier*, October 26, 1929.

²⁷⁷ Activities Month Celebration: Pittsburgh Coal Company Villages From May 13th to June 17th Nineteen Hundred and Thirty-Nine." Pittsburgh: The Company, 1939. The Pamphlet is found in both the African-American and the Coal Collections at the Heinz History Center, HD8039.M62 P693.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.* The eighteen villages listed with their "sponsoring organizations" were: Arnold City, represented by its Arnold City Community Council, Mordecai Johnson Civic Club, Harmony Welfare Club, Mount Sterling Burial Club, Blue Bird Club, and the Missionary Baptist Church; Blythedale, represented by its Blythedale Community Council, E. K. Jones Civic Club, Busy Bee Sewing Club, Riverside Club, and the Ebenezer Baptist Church; Cowden, represented by its Cowden Community Council, Kelly Miller Civil Club, and the Zion Hill Baptist Church; Crescent Heights, represented by the Crescent Heights Community Council, Home Aid Society, League of Negro Voters, Washington Civic Club, Emmanuel Tabernacle Church, and the Mount Zion Baptist Church; Fitz Henry, represented by the Fitz Henry Community Council, Dubois Civic Club, Domestique Coquettes, Youghioghenny Advance League, Les Dames Parlent Club, and the First Baptist Church; Lawrence, represented by the Lawrence Community Center, Hallie Q. Brown Civic Club, Busy Helpers Club, Ritz Club, and St. John's Baptist Church; Library, represented by the Library Community Council, Library Community Club, Sportsman Club, Mount Zion Baptist Church, and Shiloh Baptist Church; Mc Donald (West End), represented by the McDonald Community Center and the Walter White Civic Club; Midland, represented by the Midland Community Council, and the Alice Dunbar Nelson Civic Club; Pricedale, represented by the

Pricedale Community Center, Melrose Club, and Equal Rights Club; Scott Haven, represented by the Scott Haven Community Council, Maude B. Coleman Civic Club, and New Hope Baptist Church; Shaw, represented by Carter Woodson Civic Club and Mount Hope Baptist Church; Smithdale, represented by the Smithdale Community Center, Lincoln Civic Club, Shining Star Club, and Bethlehem Baptist Church; Smithton, represented by the Smithton Community Council, Vann Civic Club, and Mount Oliver Baptist Church; Southview, represented by the Paul Lawrence Dunbar Civic Club and Mount Zion Baptist Church; Van Meter, represented by the Van Meter Community Council, Poundage Club, and Macedonia Baptist Church; Westland, represented by the Westland Community Council, Bethune Civic Club, League of Negro Voters, Rose Bud Club, Croquet Club, and First Baptist Church; and Whitsett, represented by the Whitsett Community Council, Phyllis Wheatley Civic Club, Whitsett Social Club, and Pilgrim Baptist Church.

²⁷⁹ Ibid. The history and significance of the African-American church in Pennsylvania will be discussed in Chapter 5, however at least one fantastic source specifically connecting the role of the African-American church to the steel mining and coal mining towns of Western Pennsylvania is Dennis C. Dickerson's "The Black Church in Industrializing Western Pennsylvania, 1870-1950." *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* 64 (October 1981): 329-344.

²⁸⁰ Interviews with Dorris Keane and Margaret Marsh, September 23, 2008.

²⁸¹ *Pittsburgh Courier*, October 20, 1923, September-November, 1931. Nothing has been discovered that has been written on Johnson's life, but his patent remains on file at the United States Patents and Trademarks Database listed under patent 1,249,106 "G.M. Johnson, Automatic Stopping and Releasing Device For Mine Cars, Application Filed July 6, 1917, and Patented Dec. 4, 1917." United States Patent Office.

²⁸² See also Elwood S. Moore and Thomas Garrett Taylor's *The Silica Refractories of Pennsylvania*, Harrisburg: Department of Forests and Waters, 1924. McNitt, "The History of the Black Community of Mount Union, PA," 16.

²⁸³ 1910 Federal Census, Mount Union, Huntingdon County, First Ward.

²⁸⁴ 1910 Federal Census, Mount Union, Huntingdon County, Second Ward.

²⁸⁵ 1920 Federal Census, Mount Union, Huntingdon County; Richards, Frederick L., *Mount Union Historic District*, nomination document, 1994, National Park Service, National Register of Historic Places, Washington, D.C.

²⁸⁶ 1920 Federal Census, Mount Union, Huntingdon County, Second Ward.

²⁸⁷ Ibid., First and Second Wards.

²⁸⁸ Margaret Crawford, *Building the Working Man's Paradise: The Design of American Company Towns*. New York: Verso, 1995, 161.

²⁸⁹ Ibid., 162.

²⁹⁰ Ibid., 163.

²⁹¹ 1920 Federal Census, Mount Union Borough, Huntingdon County, "Enumeration District Number 89."

²⁹² 1930 Federal Census, Kistler Borough, Mifflin County.

²⁹³ *Pittsburgh Courier*, November 3, 1923, June 14, 1930, August 2, 1930, December 16, 1939. The "Kistler Colored Giants" were mentioned at least several times in the Sports Section of the *Huntingdon Daily News*--on July 9, 1937 and May 29, 1940 and were remembered by both Bernie Chatman and Alan Rogers who were interviewed in Mt. Union, July 10, 2008.

- ²⁹⁴ Interview with Bernie Chatman, July 10, 2008.
- ²⁹⁵ Ibid.
- ²⁹⁶ Interview with Alan Rogers, July 10, 2008.
- ²⁹⁷ Interview with Lowell Rogers, July 10, 2008.
- ²⁹⁸ *Pennsylvania Negro Business Directory*, 32-33.
- ²⁹⁹ Ibid., 33-36.
- ³⁰⁰ Ibid., 139.
- ³⁰¹ Ibid., 141-142.
- ³⁰² Ibid., 143.
- ³⁰³ Ibid., 144.
- ³⁰⁴ Ibid., 51.
- ³⁰⁵ Ibid., 69.
- ³⁰⁶ Lewis James Carter Jr. "Negro Migrant Labor in Pennsylvania, 1916-1930." Masters' Thesis, The Pennsylvania State University, 1936, 20.
- ³⁰⁷ Ibid., 24.
- ³⁰⁸ Ibid., 54-55, 57.
- ³⁰⁹ Ibid., 50.
- ³¹⁰ Ibid., 42-43.
- ³¹¹ Ibid., 44.
- ³¹² Ibid., 45.
- ³¹³ Joseph M. Speakman, *At Work in Penn's Woods: The Civilian Conservation Corps in Pennsylvania*. University Park: Penn State Press, 2006, 1.
- ³¹⁴ *Pittsburgh Courier*, January 25, 1936.
- ³¹⁵ Ibid.
- ³¹⁶ Roster, History and Photos for Camp Kane, Company 2314 ANF-12-Pa. Kane, Pa., 40-42. Digitally indexed at the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural properties website <http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/>.
- ³¹⁷ Ibid.
- ³¹⁸ Roster, History and Photos for Camp Emporium, Company 321, S-147, Pa. Emporium, Pa., 102-104 <http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/>.
- ³¹⁹ Ibid.
- ³²⁰ Roster, History and Photos for Camp Benezet, Company 303, S-84—Pa., Benezett, Pa., 66-68 <http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/>.
- ³²¹ *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 8th, 1935; Speakman, *At Work in Penn's Woods*, 148-152.
- ³²² Interview with Gladys Fortsen, July 11, 2008.
- ³²³ Robert C. Weaver, Negro Labor Since 1929," *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol 35, No 1(January 1950), 20-38.
- ³²⁴ Diane B. Reed, "Wanted: Women to Meet the Wartime Challenge!" in *Pennsylvania Heritage*, Spring 1995, 12-13.
- ³²⁵ Ibid., *Pittsburgh Courier*, Sept 12, 1942.

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- ³²⁶ “UMW ‘Holiday’ Hits 66500 Negro Miners, Railmen,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 19, 1949, p 2. Harry McAlpin, “Capital Transit Union Chooses Anti-Negro Head,” *Philadelphia Tribune*, January 6, 1945, 5.
- ³²⁷ “Firm Hires Negroes Following Expose,” *Philadelphia Tribune*, November 22, 1947, p 1. “FEPC Hailed for Breaking Down Job Jim Crow,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, September 1, 1951, p 1. “Urban League, USES Sign Contract to Analyze jobs,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 4, 1950, p 1. “Civil Rights, Economic Changes Dominate Negro America,” *Philadelphia Tribune*, January 2, 1954, p 5. “Mill Caught Using Job Bias Policy,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, October 8, 1960, p 10.
- ³²⁸ “Negro Income Still Only Half of Whites,” *Philadelphia Tribune*, August 25, 1953, p 15.
- ³²⁹ Census General Population Characteristics 1950 Table 87 Median Family Income.
- ³³⁰ US Census of Population; Detailed Characteristics of the Population. Table 139. Income in 1959 of families and unrelated individuals, by type of family and presence of own children by sex, age, and color of head, for the state, urban and rural, and for standard metropolitan statistical areas and counties of 25,000 or more: 1960.
- ³³¹ “Job Jim Crow Flagrant in State,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 7, 1953, p 1. “Job Bias General in Pennsylvania,” *New York Times*, March 4, 1953, 20.
- ³³² “Negro Income Growth Sags,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, April 16, 1960, A3.
- ³³³ “Unemployment Pinch Being Felt by Many More Negroes,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, January 17, 1959, B22.
- ³³⁴ *Ibid.*
- ³³⁵ A 1965 study of 68 cities, found that “Negro families with an annual income of less than the government ‘poverty line’ of \$3,000 ranged from 15 to 62 percent. ...even in the industrial cities with their varied job opportunities the percentage of Negro families living in poverty was exceptionally high. ... Philadelphia had 30% , 45,003 of 148,992 families lived in poverty. The percentage of middle class Negro families in Philadelphia was 27%.” M. S. Handler, “U.S. Finds Negroes Trapped in Menial Jobs,” *New York Times*, November 16, 1964, 21.
- ³³⁶ “Negroes’ Job Plight is Found Worsening,” *New York Times*, June 30, 1963, 1.

Chapter 5

African-American Education in Pennsylvania c. 1680 to c. 1965

From the establishment of the colony of Pennsylvania, when William Penn required that communities provide for the education of children to 20th century school property tax discussions, access to a quality education has been central to the notion of opportunity in the Commonwealth. For black Pennsylvanians, this was especially true. Compared to the South, where it became a crime to teach a slave to read, circumstances were not as restricted in the north; nonetheless it still proved difficult for a black Pennsylvanian to acquire an education.

With the earliest efforts in the 18th century to establish schooling opportunities for children of African descent, the story was marked by discrimination, insufficient properties, and segregation. Autonomy and control were important issues. Private and public education provided by white reformers emphasized white values. Public education provided in segregated schools never received the support and properties provided to white schools. When African Americans took charge of their own education, they did so in a variety of creative and effective ways. While the goals of equal access and desegregation of schools still appear distant, the result of black education in Pennsylvania were immense; by creating a broad literate black constituency, education fueled the fight against slavery, bred articulate advocates for reform, brought to life a vibrant culture, and generated the intense movement for political and civil rights, thereby remaking not only Pennsylvania's educational landscape but its political, cultural and social environments as well.



McKelvey School Classroom, c. 1930. Photo from the Library and Archives, Heinz History Center. Used with permission.

When exploring the multifaceted history of African American education in Pennsylvania from the 18th through late 20th century, it is best to approach the subject by looking more closely at three central themes: African American schooling, which occurred in formal and informal public and private settings, and under the auspices of religious, secular, or state governance; the advent and maintenance of literary societies and adult-based, male and female, extracurricular educational organizations; and the history and development of the two African American colleges, Lincoln and Cheyney Universities, both of which flourish as active institutions in the nation's Historically Black College and University (HBCU) system.

Beginning in the 18th century, a number of African American and white religious leaders, as well as black businessmen, often led the charge for the creation of private educational institutions for African American youth. These individuals were spurred at first by the absence of educational opportunities, and later the neglect by Pennsylvania to provide adequate public education to African American children. The debate over African American educational opportunities once the Commonwealth entered into the fray, however, quickly turned into one of segregation versus integration, which galvanized proponents and opponents on both sides of the racial divide.

The abundance of African American literary societies and educational clubs, organized during the 19th century, afforded their adult members a forum for learning, although their constituents were largely women and men of the middle and upper classes. The institutions identified as HBCUs differed not only in their origins but also in their missions; they underwent numerous changes in the types of education they provided and they served as foundations for the creation of educational fraternities and societies.

Private, Parochial and Public Education

The first formal educational institution in Pennsylvania to which African Americans were admitted dates to at least 1740, when Robert Bolton, a dance instructor and proprietor of a dancing hall in Philadelphia, opened a school for African American and white students. Bolton attended the evangelical sermons of George Whitefield, an itinerant Anglican evangelical minister who played a large role in the Great Awakening of 1739–1740. He was apparently so moved by Whitefield that he closed his dancing establishments to focus on the education of youth. On July 18, 1740, the *South Carolina Gazette* was the first to comment on Bolton's school. The newspaper's editors were outraged that African American education could be sanctioned by the city's authorities, and they printed a "private letter from Philadelphia" which was apparently intercepted from either Whitefield or one of his supporters to expose what they thought was an affront to the "white race."³³⁷

The letter contended Bolton had "formerly kept a dancing school, ball, assembly, concert room &c. there, being convinced that such a practice was contrary to the gospel of Christ, has lately set up a school for teaching children to read, &c and upon his giving notice that he would teach

Negroes also, had in 23 days no less than 53 black scholars. For this he was sent for and arraigned in court, as the breaker of the Negro law, but on making his defence was dismiss'd. And the next day order'd by the foreman of the Grand Jury to continue his school without interruption.”³³⁸

The Anglican Church played an active role in the establishment, in 1758, of the first all-black school in Pennsylvania, although it did so on a much more explicit level, rather than simply by providing the ideological underpinnings for Bolton's decision to open his school. Gary B. Nash believed “the ties of the black community to the Anglican church were strengthened in 1758 when the Bray Associates, an Anglican philanthropic society associated with the Church of England, launched a school for blacks in the city.” While Bolton's Anglican-influenced school and the Bray school were revolutionary in terms of being the first of their kind—even though they were run by a white hierarchy and white teachers—it was paradoxical to note that all of this happened in a denomination that had the largest number of slave owners in its ranks during the 18th century. (It's estimated that Anglicans in Pennsylvania accounted for 42 percent of the total slave-owning population in 1775 and 43 percent in 1790, by far the largest group.) Even Whitefield supported the institution of slavery and eventually purchased slaves.³³⁹

As a group, Quakers were much less ambivalent about their condemnation of slavery than the Anglicans, although a number of their members owned slaves and the church itself did not play an active role in penalizing these individuals until the latter half of the 18th century. Quakers first broached the subject of educating individuals of African descent in 1770 with the formation of a school by Anthony Benezet. “By the late 1760s the issue of slavery and slaveholding among the membership had been settled by the Philadelphia Quakers,” wrote scholar Vincent P. Franklin,

and they had begun to provide for the schooling and manual training of the slaves and ex-slaves of the Friends. Again, at the suggestion of Anthony Benezet, who had been instructing black children in his home from the 1750s, the Philadelphia Quaker Monthly Meeting in 1770 decided to start a class for Quaker slaves who were being prepared for freedom, and for free blacks. The school, which was attached to the Friends' School in the city, not only provided instruction in reading, writing, and arithmetic, but also offered formal religious training. Benezet, who wanted to demonstrate that blacks could be educated to the same extent as whites, became the school's instructor in 1782 and remained there until his death in 1784.” Benezet's school became known as the Raspberry Alley or Raspberry Street School, and W. E. B. Du Bois wrote that between 1844 and 1866 “eight thousand pupils in all were instructed.”³⁴⁰

The most significant of schools established by Quakers to instruct African American youth, which were eventually run and taught exclusively by African Americans, was the Institute for Colored Youth (ICY), established in 1837 by a bequest of Richard Humphreys, who died in 1832. (ICY eventually became the Cheyney Training School for Teachers in 1914, a process that began twelve years earlier.) Originally called “The African School,” it was located on a tract of 150 acres on the Old York Road on the outskirts of Philadelphia. Humphreys’s school was not long after christened the Institute for Colored Youth, and its original mission to act as a farming and trades school was discontinued by 1851 because, according to Roger Lane, it was “discovered” that “farmers couldn’t teach and teachers couldn’t farm, and that boys brought out from the city rebelled against all of them.” In 1851, Humphreys’s original concept was amended in the school’s bylaws. Lane wrote, “the board of managers decided to build a substantial school near Seventh and Lombard, and to reorganize it, to educate girls as well as boys, and to stress neither farm or manual labor.” The school became a teacher training school and served not only as a primary school but also as a secondary school.³⁴¹

After recruiting Charles L. Reason from New York to act as the school’s principal and head of the boys department, the school reopened in 1852 with six students. Reason was soon joined by Grace A. Mapps, hired to head the girls department. Mapps was, according to Roger Lane, “the first Afro-American woman to win a degree from a four-year college in America” and Reason was the first African American professor at a predominantly white college in the United States. Sarah Mapps Douglass, Grace Mapps’s cousin, joined Douglass and Reason, and her “small private school was then annexed to the Institute as a preparatory school for girls.”³⁴²

African American parents in Philadelphia had alternatives when deciding where to send their children for a primary education during the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The Pennsylvania Abolition Society, Franklin contended, “provided financial assistance to schools founded by blacks,” and in 1790, “opened schools for free blacks.” Two schools that enjoyed funding were operated by Eleanor Harris, described by Franklin as “an educated black woman” who “ran a school on Cherry Street that was financed by the Abolition Society” from 1795 until 1797, and Cyrus Bustill, an African American Quaker and a successful baker who, in 1797, “built a house at Third and Green Streets, where he opened a school for African American children in 1803.” The Pennsylvania Abolition Society opened a large, well-equipped elementary school for African American children in 1812 on Cherry Street, between Sixth and Seventh streets. In 1813, the school, named Clarkson Hall, “opened . . . with an enrollment of 94 boys.” On the second floor, school officials “allowed a female teacher, Elizabeth Clendenin, to operate her own school for approximately 50 girls.”³⁴³

Philadelphia’s African Americans were also able to send their children to one of a number of African American church schools in the city. Absalom Jones and Richard Allen ran schools in

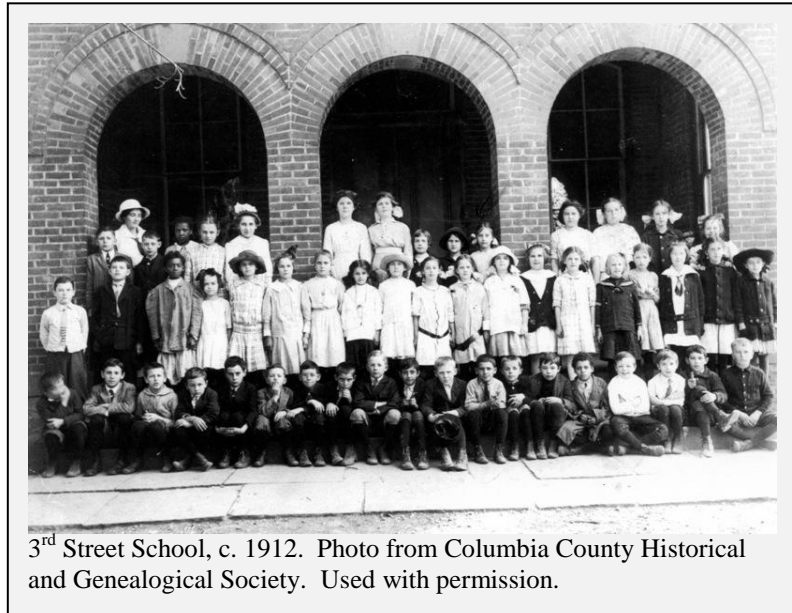
the basements of their church buildings. In 1797, Jones “established a school in the parish house of his African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas.” Allen, according to Gary B. Nash, “organized the first black Sunday school in America at Bethel in 1795, and he may have launched a night school there in the next year.”³⁴⁴

A group of individuals consisting of African American church leaders and businessmen met in

1818 to form an organization to provide aid, teachers, and classroom space for children of African descent in Philadelphia, the Pennsylvania Augustine Society for the Education of People of Colour (PASEPC). The society erected a school in 1822 on Sixth Street, between Lombard and Pine streets, opposite Mother Bethel Church, and it remained a viable and self-sufficient institution for four years. Among its founding members were Jones and Allen, the Reverend John Gloucester, an African Presbyterian; Quamoney Clarkson, a teacher; James Forten, a prosperous sail-maker; Robert Douglas, a barber; Joseph Cassey, a barber, wig-maker, and perfumer; Francis Perkins, proprietor of an oyster house; and Randall Shepherd, a fruit dealer.³⁴⁵ They eloquently pleaded for the schooling of African American children during the PASEPC’s founding meeting at Bethel Church on September 30, 1818:

We the Subscribers, persons of colour of the city of Philadelphia, in the State of Pennsylvania, sensibly impressed with the high importance of education, towards the improvement of our own species, in an individual as well as a social capacity; and fully persuaded, that it is to the prominently defective system of instruction, as it now exists among us . . . with serious concern, the formidable barriers that prejudices, powerful as they are unjust, have reared to impede our progress in the paths of science and of virtue, rendering it almost impossible to obtain for our offspring such instruction as we deem essentially necessary to qualify them for the useful walks of society.³⁴⁶

The answer to this was another means of education, undertaken by their own hands and without the help of either white charitable or religious organizations, and as such they uttered, “We



3rd Street School, c. 1912. Photo from Columbia County Historical and Genealogical Society. Used with permission.

therefore are convinced, that it is an unquestionable duty of which we owe to ourselves, to our posterity, and to our God . . . the most effectual means to procure for our children a more extensive and useful education than we have heretofore had in our power to effect; and now, confidently relying upon the zealous and unanimous support of our coloured brethren, under the protection of the divine providence, have resolved to unite and form ourselves into a society, to be known by the name of ‘The Augustine Education Society of Pennsylvania,’ for the establishment and maintenance of a Seminary, in which children of colour shall be taught all the useful and scientific branches of education, as far as may be found practicable.”³⁴⁷

PASEPC’s founders were unhappy with the treatment that African American children received under the legislative practices of Philadelphia and, later, Pennsylvania. Philadelphia had enacted on March 6, 1818, the first city-wide public education district in the Commonwealth without addressing the needs of the region’s young African Americans. The first African American public school in the city was not instituted until 1822, four years after the 1818 act, with the establishment of the segregated Mary Street School for boys in the “Old Presbyterian Meeting House on St. Mary’s St.”³⁴⁸

By 1834, Pennsylvania had become involved in the process of sanctioning public education on a statewide basis, passing a sweeping bill that endorsed the practice of building, aiding, and requiring children to attend primary and secondary public schools. Although several new public schools for African American children were opened in Pennsylvania in the 1820s and 1830s, there was no language in the local and state bills that specifically addressed the issue of African American education. Not only was the quality of care often inferior, but they also lacked black teachers, and in many cities there was actually no public African American education at all.³⁴⁹

In Pittsburgh, in 1832, two years before the general assembly’s passage of public education legislation, a group of African American leaders, including John B. Vashon, Lewis Woodson, Abraham D. Lewis, and Martin R. Delany (being mentored at the time by Lewis Woodson) formed the African Education Society (AES) to “purchase such books and periodicals as the society may deem it expedient” and “raise money by subscription or otherwise, to purchase ground, and erect thereon a suitable building or buildings for the accommodation and education of youth, and a hall for the use of a society.”³⁵⁰

While the Bethel Church, in which this meeting was conducted, provided (under the auspices of the AES) education to some African American children in the 1830s, the city did not embrace the Commonwealth’s promise of public education for all until it had been influenced by a series of letters written in 1837 to the school board by Samuel Church, Alexander Laughlin, and the influential white philanthropist Charles Avery. Avery developed his own school for African Americans in 1849, the Allegheny Institute and Mission Church, or Avery College, for African American children. Avery, Church, and Laughlin asked “to be allowed to attend the already

established white common schools.” After the city granted their request, Pittsburgh’s African American citizens held a mass gathering to celebrate the accomplishment and adopt resolutions for its implementation.³⁵¹

On February 7, 1837, the *Pittsburgh Gazette* published an article entitled “Public School Meeting of Colored Citizens of Pittsburgh” which reported, “a meeting of Colored Citizens of Pittsburgh was held in the African Methodist Church on Monday evening,” during which a preamble and resolutions were adopted:

WHEREAS it is with deep felt satisfaction, we have heard that the joint meetings of school Directors in the city, have determined to organize a public school for the instruction of our youth which school both they and we desire, should go into operation as soon as possible; and have requested us to furnish the Board of Directors in each ward, with number, age, residence, name of parents, friend or guardian of the Colored children, residing in each ward respectively.

THEREFORE RESOLVED, that J. B. Vashon, and A. D. Lewis, for the West Ward; Richard Bryan, and Samuel Bruce for the North Ward; Thomas Norris, and Charles Peters, for the East Ward; Samuel Johnson and George Gardiner for the South Ward, to ascertain number, etc., of children in their respective Wards. . .

³⁵²

Despite this initial success, it took several years for the school to open. It was headed by John N. Templeton, the first African American principal to both teach and supervise a public school in Pennsylvania. Among the first African Americans to graduate from Athens College in Ohio, Templeton was the secretary of the Pittsburgh branch of the African American state convention movement, and took part, in 1841, in drafting a petition for suffrage sent to the state legislature. His school, held first in “a small church in Miltenberger’s Alley,” moved to Wylie Avenue Church in the late 1840s.³⁵³

Following Templeton’s death in 1851, Martin R. Delany took over the school and taught for a brief period, with a “Miss E. L. Peck as his assistant.” The school “declined in number and provisions” until it moved to the Wesleyan Church in spring 1855. During the 1850s, the public education of Pennsylvania’s African Americans was inconsistent because few schools existed, there was a low percentage of black teachers and administrators, and there was a lack of funding which created a pitiful environment.³⁵⁴

Across the Commonwealth, in Philadelphia, Robert Purvis, proponent of education and ardent abolitionist, raised a complaint in 1853 against what he felt was the discriminatory nature of the city's public school system. He believed it was hypocritical for him and fellow African Americans to pay taxes meant to bolster a system of education from which his children were excluded. In a letter published in *The Liberator* on December 16, 1853, Purvis expressed his disgust and criticized the tax collector.³⁵⁵

“You called yesterday for the tax upon my property in this Township,” he wrote, “which I shall pay, excepting the ‘School Tax.’ I object to the payment of this tax, on the ground that my rights as a citizen, and my feelings as a man and a parent, have been grossly outraged in depriving me, in violation of law and justice, of the benefits of the school system which this tax was designed to sustain. . . . I have borne this outrage ever since the innovation upon the usual practice of admitting all the children in the Township into the Public Schools, and at considerable expense, have been obliged to obtain the services of private teachers to instruct my children.”³⁵⁶

Purvis's appeal was partly answered by an 1854 statute that amended the 1834 public school act requiring municipalities to establish schools for African Americans. The schools were to be exclusively “separate” facilities, for which the funding was typically poor and which were often helmed by a staff consisting of white teachers and administrators. During the following several decades, several individuals in Pittsburgh and Reading challenged the policy, but the most notable was a complaint lodged by Lewis Brown in Wilkes-Barre in 1873.³⁵⁷

Wilkes-Barre did not have public schools voluntarily created for African Americans between 1834 and 1854. After the passage of the statute in 1854 requiring segregated public schooling, a “Colored School” was funded by the community and the Commonwealth. It was located in Bethel AME Church. According to Emerson I. Moss, “the building was described as dilapidated” and “the teachers were charged with being unprepared.”³⁵⁸

By 1873, the condition of the school was as such that it “prompted a mass meeting of Negro parents at the Bethel AME Church in October,” which “endorsed the action of Mr. Lewis Brown, a local Negro parent, who had sued the city district because his children were denied admission to a white school near his home.” Ruling in Brown's favor, the court decreed that while segregated schools were legal, specific districts were entitled to admit black students if they had less than twenty African Americans living within their boundaries, forcing the children to travel outside of their “district” in order to attend a “Colored School.”³⁵⁹

Regardless of whether municipalities in Pennsylvania followed the precedent established by this ruling, schools for African Americans remained separate and often under-funded, and the policy of segregated schools on a statewide level was not successfully challenged until a court case in Crawford County in 1881 struck the racial language from the 1854 legislation. Elias H. Allen, an African American resident of Meadville sued for his children's admittance to the city's white school. Edward J. Price Jr. recounted Allen initially "applied to the school directors to admit his children to the Huidekoper Grammar School, the public school for the ward in which he lived" but the school administrators "informed Allen that he would have to send his children to the school provided for blacks." Allen believed the directors "violated his rights as defined by the Fourteenth Amendment," with which Judge Pearson Church concurred. In his ruling on May 9, 1881, Judge Church decreed the amendment did protect the right of an equal education and, hence, the schools were "unequal."³⁶⁰

After the legislation was revised, communities, both large and small, continued to practice segregation in primary and secondary education by adopting new redistricting schemes—the only caveat being that the teachers at the public "Colored Schools" were typically African American. Of the schools "chiefly attended by Negroes" in Philadelphia as of 1898, Du Bois wrote, "all the teachers are colored except those in the Ramsey and Miller schools, who are all white. . . . Many of the colored schools have a high reputation for efficient work." After 1920, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) took up the task of suing local school boards for their segregationist practices. In Philadelphia, between 1922 and 1925, Franklin argued, "Enraged black parents whose children were denied admission to their



1907's graduating class from Oakmont High School. Photo from Oakmont Historical Image Collection. Used with permission.

neighborhood school, and told to enroll in the nearest black school, sometimes brought suit against the Board of Education for discrimination.”³⁶¹

In 1926, the *Philadelphia Tribune* held a series of defense fund drives to raise money for litigation against the school district in such cases, although the local chapter of the NAACP, which was to have been the beneficiary of the fund, was in disarray and no successful suit took place. In 1932, the protest in the Philadelphia African American community turned out more successfully; members forced the removal of a book from the junior high school curriculum for the city, entitled *Problems in American Democracy*. The movement began in winter 1931 after Floyd L. Logan, a “U.S. Customs Office employee,” wrote to the school board and mentioned that the book contained derogatory language about African Americans. Not long after, the *Philadelphia Tribune* joined the battle and published a front-page expose on the book on January 14, 1932, which effectively led the acting superintendent of Philadelphia’s school district to remove *Problems in American Democracy* from circulation.³⁶²

Another successful challenge to segregationist practices in the schools occurred in Berwyn, Chester County, in May 1934. African American parents, with the help of lawyers Raymond Pace Alexander and Maceo Hubbard, along with the newly formed Educational Equality League of Philadelphia, successfully sued the Easttown School District over discrimination in its primary grade school. The positive outcome in this case was the result of a hard fought, two-year battle during which several parents were arrested “for violating truancy laws.” Rallies were held at locations such as Mother Bethel AME Church in Philadelphia, which attracted 4,000 people to raise funds for litigation costs. The case stirred up a great deal of protest among southeastern Pennsylvania’s African Americans because, as Franklin contended, “all of the black children in the two districts were placed in a separate one-room schoolhouse, with one black teacher instructing grades one through six.” Although a “new elementary school had recently been opened, black children were not allowed to attend it.”³⁶³

According to Davison M. Douglas, the results of a 1948 statewide study conducted by the NAACP on segregation in Pennsylvania’s schools found that communities such as Chester, Washington, Downingtown, Kennett Square, Avondale, and Aliquippa, “operated segregated classrooms within integrated schools with black teachers teaching only black children.” Similar to the Berwyn case, “black children of various ages and ability were combined in one room, resulting in an educational experience not only separate but inferior to that offered to white students.” The hiring of black teachers in integrated schools was not much better. If they were even hired in the first place, they were typically required to teach in overcrowded, multi-grade level classrooms, all containing African American students. In many school districts, African American teachers were not hired at all, as was the case in Pittsburgh.³⁶⁴

In *Jim Crow Moves North: The Battle Over Northern School Segregation, 1865-1964*, Douglass articulately detailed the scenario concerning African American teachers attempting to work in Pittsburgh's schools: "Aspiring black teachers who sought teaching jobs in Pittsburgh," wrote Douglass,

were counseled by the Pittsburgh school superintendent to 'go South' to look for work. One Black graduate of the University of Pittsburgh was informed by the director of personnel for the Pittsburgh school board in 1937, 'It's too bad you're not white. I'd hire you immediately.' As a result, during the mid-1930s, many Pittsburgh Blacks favored the creation of a separate school system for their children in an effort to secure Black teachers. Beginning in 1937 and continuing throughout the 1940s, Pittsburgh's school board hired a number of Black teachers, but primarily to teach nonacademic subjects such as physical education, home economics, and industrial arts in the predominantly Black schools of the Hill District. Black teachers served almost exclusively in largely Black schools until the 1960s.³⁶⁵

By the early to mid-20th century, it was becoming evident that Pennsylvania's public school system perpetuated a confounding paradox when it came to the schooling of African Americans. If the schools were segregated, it was illegal according to Pennsylvania's 1881 law, and the conditions of such schools were not always the best due to underfunding, yet these schools typically hired more, if not exclusively in many cases, teachers who were African American. If the schools were integrated, African American children often experienced either explicit or implicit discrimination. In most cases, African American teachers were not hired to work in these institutions at all.

The segregated James Adams School in Coatesville (which eventually developed into a primary and junior high school for students up until the ninth grade) employed an exclusively black staff, as well as African American principals, until it ceased operation in 1961. It closed as the result of the state and local NAACP's successful fight for ending school segregation in the city. Its curriculum not only emphasized a thorough liberal arts education but also involved the teaching of African American history at a time when schools across the Commonwealth had not even considered the idea.³⁶⁶

The school was first established in 1906 as a response to the increase in the city's African American population due to the employment opportunities that were opening up in the city's steel mills. The *Village Record* declared, "Coatesville's colored population has grown so rapidly and has become so large that the School Board are about to erect a new school building for the

negro children of that borough . . . at the corner of Eighth avenue and Merchant street.” On January 8, 1925, a new school opened at the same location and was rededicated as the James Adams Community School in honor of the first African American elected to city council, who won his seat in the late 19th century. The school included grades first through ninth. Its superintendent, H. R. Vanderslice, announced his goal was to address “the experiences of the colored youth in grades seven to twelve in Coatesville,” which, he said, “has always been more or less unfortunate. . . . In the forty-five years of its history (1878-1923) Coatesville High School issued diplomas to but sixteen colored folk.”³⁶⁷



Regardless of Vanderslice’s intentions—that is, whether he truly supported the creation of an all-black elementary and junior high school to better aid African Americans so that when they went to the “integrated” high school they would be better able “to succeed” (as opposed to him simply wanting an all-black school established so students would not enroll in the majority white Charles Street School)—the Adams Community School thrived for a period of more than thirty-five years as a solidly grounded institution promoting a variety of educational and social activities. In June 1932, an article in the *Coatesville Record* noted, “A class of twenty-one boys and girls graduated from the James Adams Junior High School, East Coatesville, during impressive commencement exercises held in the school auditorium last night.” Among the festivities were “selections by the junior high

school glee club, a vocal solo by Pearl Bailey, and vocal selections by a ladies quartet.” In addition, the “Rev. J. C. Spivey, Bethel AME Church, and Rev. A. E. Mann, Union AME Church, were the pastors assisting in the program.”³⁶⁸

The school offered evening classes for adults, and, in February 1933, an article in the *Record* cited, “Enrollment at the night school being held at the James Adams School, East Coatesville, is now up to fifty-three men and women, the largest numbers in its seven year existence.” The following year, an article about the 1934 graduation ceremonies at the junior high school, reported that a number of the new graduates were “tuition pupils who finished the Eight grade in rural schools.” It also noted that prizes were awarded to the year’s best students, including James Cannon, who won “The Negro History prize,” James Quash, winner of the “American Legion

Medal for citizenship and all-around school work,” and Odessa Murry, who was recognized for “high scholastic attainment for three years in Junior High School.”³⁶⁹

For the 1938 graduation ceremonies, teachers and students adopted the theme “World Peace.” According to the Record, “the discussion centered about the theme of world affairs as found in the governments of China, Japan, Germany, Italy, Russia, Great Britain and the United States.” The newspaper reported the “invocation was given by the Rev. S. Quash, pastor of the Second Baptist Church,” and Dora Walker sang “From the Land of the Sky Blue Water.” Prizes were presented, including three “awards in Mathematics” given to Henry Jacks, John Fells, and Rosetta Quash.³⁷⁰

After a fire damaged part of the school on October 1, 1940, the building was repaired, but it wasn’t returned to a decent condition until a four-room addition was built and opened in April 1942. The festivities for the opening of the annex were attended by the school’s first African American principal, Thomas J. Anderson (a professor at Howard University who returned the following year to his old post), and Dr. John Brodhead, principal of the Arnold School in Philadelphia. Mrs. A. S. Pugh, reputedly “the nearest living relative to James A. Adams for whom the building was named,” provided “an interesting history of Mr. Adams’ life.” Of the four new rooms in the new annex, there were “a dining room which is also used as a stage, a kitchen, a sewing room and a music room.”³⁷¹

The school received honors and accolades over the years. In 1946, it was recognized as “a member of the National Junior Honor Society” a designation which the *Coatesville Record* reported made it “the first public school in Coatesville to be accorded this distinctive recognition.” Principal Anderson confirmed this status was conferred upon the school by the National Education Association, encouraged by the Pennsylvania Department of Education, which had submitted an excellent letter of recommendation for the school.³⁷²

The school formally opened a community center on October 15, 1944. Two years later, in October 1946, it conducted “indoor Fall and Winter programs,” and activities took place “every school day evening from 7 to 10 p.m.” Among these were a “‘Teen Age Rendezvous’ for boys and girls of the junior and senior high schools” that was “supervised by two of the female teachers of the Adams School,” and a “craft program” for both youth and adults, “specializing in ceramics, leather work, clay modeling and toy making.” In addition, the “Free Evening School for Adults” operated “twice a week on Tuesdays and Thursdays.” In 1950, the newspaper noted that on October 23, the community center and night school opened the season with “a sewing class in which 15 members enrolled, conducted by Mrs. Elizabeth Palmer,” and “gymnasium activities including basketball, boxing and wrestling” and “ping pong and shuffleboard.” The adult choral group held its practices at the center, where “movies for young people” were also shown.³⁷³

In 1954, the center's program director estimated that a total of 13,784 people had been "in attendance at the center during the 1953-54 season." Activities at the school over the years included a nursery school, which the Record described after its opening in 1935 as "the only nursery school for colored children in Pennsylvania, exclusive of those established a few years ago in Philadelphia . . . for kiddies between the ages of three and five, and a summer camp for youth." During summers in the early 1950s, the camp operated with the aid of the Pomeroy Farm and Vocational School in Chester County, a 268-acre farm on the Brandywine Creek owned by the Bureau of Colored Children of Philadelphia.³⁷⁴

Throughout the 1950s, the academic and athletic experiences of the elementary and junior high school students at James Adams continued to be fulfilling. Two articles published in May and June 1954 about the school's commencement exercises contained information that the "P. Craig mathematics award" and the "Dr. S.W. Ridgway award to the most promising students" were presented to Brenda Bradford and Beverly Hamilton and Amelia Burgess and Nathaniel Alston, respectively. The awards program was expanded to include a variety of honors and prizes, including varsity and junior varsity letters for both boys and girls in basketball and track and field, and certificates for cheerleaders and student managers of the sports teams. Wilt Chamberlain visited the school in 1955 for its annual alumni, faculty, and community center awards event preceding the commencement activities, and "was almost mobbed" by a throng of "autograph seekers."³⁷⁵



A class from Farrell Middle School, 1959. From Mercer County Historical Society. Used with permission.

While the school remained operational for several more years, as the school district did not adhere immediately to the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, several members of the city's black community protested, complaining the Adams school was becoming overcrowded and that children walked by "'two white' schools to attend classes at the all-Negro James Adams school." A September 1957 article in the *New York Times* entitled, "3 Schools Integrate: Districts Near Philadelphia End Segregation" reported, "Two

school districts in near-by Chester County-Coatesville and Kennett Consolidated in Kennett

Square announced today that they had ended racial segregation. Both districts were found to be practicing segregation on the basis of answers they gave last spring in a survey conducted by the State Department of Public Instruction. Until this year, the James Adams Community School in Coatesville was all-Negro, while the Terry Elementary School in the same community was all white. Now the pupils in both schools are mixed. In Kennett Square the third grade in the consolidated school was segregated, but is integrated now, according to M. E. Prettyman, supervising principal.”³⁷⁶

On the other hand, public schools in Pennsylvania failed to achieve the goal of real integration—not because of lack of interest on the part of the state or many citizens, but because of the intractable realities of population distribution. For example, throughout the 1950s and 60s, despite fair housing and desegregation laws, the population remained largely segregated by community. Unrelenting opposition by realtors, who maintained an ethic of neighborhood racial homogeneity, pushed black buyers away from white neighborhoods, while white communities used tactics ranging from exclusionary zoning to outright violence to repel black residents, which kept them confined to city neighborhoods or to nearly all-black enclaves in the suburbs.³⁷⁷

19th Century Literary and Educational Societies

In the 19th century, self-improvement societies of all sorts were popular among both black and white Pennsylvanians. For many, such societies provided an opportunity for entertainment and socializing along with a chance to purify their diets, connect to nature, read improving literature, and the like. For black Pennsylvanians such groups offered the venue for intellectual expression and for learning denied them elsewhere. They also became venues for social activism. Almost all of the black literary and educational societies subscribed to the conventional cultural assumption that improvement of the individual meant uplift for the race. They were distinctly 19th century phenomena in the sense that they emphasized the importance of individual self-improvement for social good. By the turn of the century other ideas and agendas, such as political activism, began to replace the notion of individual responsibility with the complex of individual rights and societal responsibility.

The expansive history of literary and educational societies in Pennsylvania began in 1828 in Philadelphia with the establishment of the Colored Reading Society of Philadelphia by William Whipper. On December 26, 1828, Whipper’s address before the first meeting of the society was published in *Freedom’s Journal*. He began by asserting, “If it be useful to cherish moral and intellectual improvement, the occasion which has called us together is one of high interest. The establishment of a literary institution, whether we consider it as connected with the progress of science in times past, or associated with its future advancement, is an event which we cannot regard with feelings of indifference.”³⁷⁸

Moving on to list the society’s objectives, Whipper identified seven responsibilities:

1st. This Society shall be known and distinguished by the name of
The Coloured Reading Society for mental improvement.

2ndly. All persons initiated into this Society , shall become
members in the same mode as is customary in all benevolent
institutions with the same strictness and regard to the moral
qualifications as is necessary in all institutions to secure their
welfare.

3rdly. Every person on becoming a member of this institution,
shall pay into the hands of the Treasurer, his initiation fee and
monthly dues.

4thly. All monies received by this Society , (with the exception of
wood, light, rent, &c.) is to be expended in useful books, such as
the Society may from time to time appropriate.

5thly. All books initiated into this Society, shall be placed in the
care of the Librarian belonging to said institution and it shall be
this duty deliver to said members alternately, such books as they
shall demand; with strict regard that no member shall keep said
book out of the library longer than one week, without paying the
fine prescribed in the constitution, unless an apology for sickness
or absence: those shall be the only excuses received.

6thly. It shall be the duty of this Society to meet once a week to
return and receive book, to read, and express whatever sentiments
they may have conceived if they think proper, and transact the
necessary business relative to this institution.

7thly and lastly. It shall be our whole duty to instruct and assist
each other in the improvement of our minds, as we wish to see the
flame of improvement spreading amongst our brethren, and
friends; and the means prescribed shall be our particular province;
therefore we hope that many of our friends will avail themselves of
the opportunity of becoming members of this useful institution.³⁷⁹



Interior view of a home showing a group of African American children posing with a representative of the John Greenleaf Whittier Home Library. Photo from Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh. Used with permission.

Whipper reiterated his belief that education was tied to racial uplift. “I must now attempt to exhibit to you,” he said, “that there is an indifference in ourselves relative to emancipating our brethren from universal thralldom; and if this had, and would at the present be attended to, might be the means of ameliorating our condition much, and that is by a strict attention to education.”³⁸⁰

He also believed those involved in promoting education were at the vanguard of African American

community building. “We find those men who have ever been instrumental in raising a community into respectability, have devoted their best and happiest years to this important object; have lived laborious days, and restless nights, made a sacrifice of ease, health and social joys; and terminated their useful career in poverty, with the only consoling hope that they had done justice to their fellowmen, and should in their last hours of triumphant prospect lie down on the bed of fame and live to future ages.”³⁸¹

Although nothing in Whipper’s bylaws indicated his was a purely male-oriented club, several of Philadelphia’s African American female leaders organized their own club, the Female Literary Society, in September 1831. The association also published its constitution in a national journal. On December 3, 1831, William Lloyd Garrison’s *The Liberator* ran a piece about the association and its mission: “At a meeting convened at Philadelphia, September 17th, an address was delivered recommending the institution of a society, having for its object the mental improvement of females, in pursuance whereof, it was resolved, that a committee be appointed to draft a constitution.”³⁸²

The constitution’s preamble, officially adopted on September 20, read, in part, “it therefore becomes a duty incumbent upon us women, as daughters of a despised race, to use our utmost endeavors to enlighten the understanding, to cultivate the talents entrusted to our keeping, that by so doing, we may in great measure, break down the strong barrier of prejudice, and raise ourselves to an equality with those of our fellow beings.” The women next agreed to call themselves the Female Literary Association of Philadelphia. Among their duties laid out in the articles of the constitution, the “Librarian shall have charge of all books belonging to the

Association, and after each meeting, take care that they be placed in the Library,” and the “Duty of the Purchasing Committee shall be to procure suitable books for the Association, and present their bills, properly signed for the Treasurer for payment.” The association’s “annual subscription” was one dollar and fifty cents, and events “devoted to reading and recitation” were “to be held once in every week.”³⁸³

One of the founders of the association, twenty-five-year-old teacher Sarah Mapps Douglass used the organization as a forum for her nascent yet powerful protests against the institution of slavery. In 1832, *The Liberator* published one of her addresses on the subject, in which she shared her early experiences where she had “formed a little world of my own, and cared not to move beyond its precincts.” After she came face to face with the harsh realities of what it meant to be an African American woman living in a time in which, because of her race, she could be kidnapped at any moment and deported to the South, she exclaimed, “But how was the scene changed when I beheld the oppressor lurking on the border of my peaceful home! I saw his iron hand stretched forth to seize me as his prey, and the cause of the slave became my own. I started up, and with one mighty effort threw from me the lethargy which had covered me as a mantle for years; and determined, by the help of the Almighty, to use every exertion in my power to elevate the character of my wronged and neglected race.”³⁸⁴

Another educational society was organized in the early 1830s in Philadelphia—by all men. The Philadelphia Library Company of Colored Persons was founded by Robert Purvis, Frederick Hinton, James Needham, and Thomas Butler, among others, and its goals were published in *Hazard’s Register* on March 16, 1833. In their preamble, the members stated, “We, the people of color of this city, being deeply impressed with the necessity of promoting among our rising youth, a proper cultivation for literary pursuits and the improvement of the faculties and powers of their minds, deem it necessary to state for the information of our friends wherever situated, that we have succeeded in organizing an institution under the title of ‘the Philadelphia Library Company of Colored Persons. . . . In accordance with which we most respectfully appeal to the friends of science and of the people of this color, for such books or other donations as will facilitate the object of this institution.” According to Thomas Augst and Kenneth E. Carpenter, the Library Company sponsored a weekly lecture series from October through May. The authors concluded the organization “had more than 600 volumes in its collection and at least 150 members” by 1838.³⁸⁵

In Pittsburgh, Martin R. Delany was involved in the founding of two of the city’s earliest African American literary societies, the Theban Literary Society, in 1832, and the Young Men’s Literary and Moral Reform Society, in 1834. He established the Theban Literary Society with a fellow Jefferson College student, Molliston M. Clark. Delany’s biographer, Robert Steven Levine, wrote Delany and Clark modeled the club on “Benjamin Franklin’s Junto.” Delany chose the

name because it indicated his “devotion to African culture,” and used the new club as a forum to hone his writing and public speaking skills.³⁸⁶

Describing a vivid scene from this period in Pittsburgh’s history, J. Ernest Wright and Marian Holmes, researchers and writers working for the Works Progress Administration in 1940, described activities of the Theban Literary Society: “between orations and declamations made by the young men of the [society],” women “might sing a solo, accompanying themselves on the guitar.” Delany was also a founding member of the Young Men’s Literary and Moral Reform Society. R. J. M. Blackett wrote that the Theban Society joined the Young Men’s Moral Reform Society to create a new organization, the Young Men’s Literary and Moral Reform Society.³⁸⁷ Part temperance society and part literary society, the consolidated group published its bylaws in the *Colored American* on September 2, 1837:

We the young men of color of the city of Pittsburg and vicinity, feeling the necessity and demand of literary talent among us, and the general reformation of our people; being conscious also that the accomplishment of these objects depend in a good measure upon our efforts as a people, and more particularly upon the young and rising generation, do agree to form ourselves into an association, to be governed by the following Constitution and By-laws: “This Society shall be styled The Young Men's Literary and Moral Reform Society of the City of Pittsburg and vicinity, and shall be auxiliary to the American Moral Reform Society. . . . The Officers of the society shall be a President, Vice President, two Secretaries, (Corresponding and Recording,) Librarian and seven Counselors, who shall constitute a Board of Managers.³⁸⁸

Article II. The objects of this society shall be, the literary, moral and intellectual improvement of the young and rising generation, by the establishment of a library, the promotion of education and morality, and instruction in the mechanical arts, so far as in our power lies. . . . Any young man of known moral habits and respectability, who has attained the age of eighteen years, and not exceeding thirty-five, may become a member of this society, by paying fifty cents on entrance and twelve and half cents monthly. . . . All nominations for membership shall be offered by a member in a written petition, at a meeting of the society, and shall be referred to the Board who shall act upon the same at their next meeting, and if found worthy, may be received by a majority of the members present at the next meeting of the society. . . . Any

member violating the principles set forth in this Constitution, for the first offence shall be admonished and reprov'd by the President, and for the second may be expelled from the society by a majority of the members present. . . . The funds of this society shall be appropriated to the establishment of a Library and the diffusion of light and knowledge on the subjects embraced in this constitution. . . . The annual meeting of this society shall be on the second Monday in May of each year, at which time the election of officers shall take place. . . . This Constitution may be altered or amended at any annual meeting of the society by a majority of the members present. . . . The stated meetings of this society shall be on the first Friday of each month.³⁸⁹

Founders of the Young Men's Literary and Moral Reform Society included Zulacher Newman, William J. Granly, Martin R. Delany, Orand Lewis, Matthew Jones, Edward Parker, Vincent A. Johnson, George Parker, John N. Templeton, and John H. Butler. The officers in 1837 were president, Zulacher Newman; vice president, William J. Granly; recording secretary, Orand Lewis; corresponding secretary, John N. Templeton; librarian, Martin R. Delany; and counselors, Charles T. Williamson, John H. Burler, U. A. Johnson, Matthew Jones, William Barley, Benjamin Jones, and Edward Parker.³⁹⁰

In Philadelphia, the Banneker Institute, one of the city's longest lasting African American literary societies was formed in 1854 and lasted until 1872. It was named for African American mathematician Benjamin Banneker. Emma Jones Lapsansky surmised the institute was first founded in 1853 by "some five dozen African American men," who originally called it "the Alexandrian Institute, a young men's instruction society," but in 1854 it was reorganized under its current name. Throughout the 1860s, the AME Church's *Christian Recorder* often took note of the institute's proceedings. By examining these articles, scholars can gain a more complete picture of the inner workings of the society, as well as what it meant to the city's African Americans.³⁹¹

The elections of officers for 1863 were recorded on January 24: "the following officers were elected for the ensuing year. President.- Jacob C. White, Jr. Vice President.- Joel Selsey. Recording Secretary.- St. Geo. R. Taylor. Corresp. - Octavius V. Catto. Treasurer.- William H. Minton. COMMITTEE ON DEBATES AND LECTURES.- Joel Selsey, Ch'r'm'n, Parker T. Smith, and J. Wesley Simpson. St. Geo. R. Taylor, Rec. Sec."

One of the many events and activities sponsored by the institute was reported in the February, 14, 1863, edition of the *Christian Recorder*: "a lecture was delivered before the Banneker Institute, at the St. Thomas' Lecture Room, on last Tuesday night, by Prof. A. M. Green, The

subject was: ‘Lessons in the School of Mythology.’” The Recorder noted, “The speaker commenced by saying that we could learn many lessons from the heathen school of mythology. He also referred to some of the most important and interesting specimens of heathen religion, literature, and science. Passing from these subjects, he took up the habits and customs of the Greeks, Romans, and Egyptians, and dwelt upon them most eloquently. The speaker also showed that in this, our own day, a considerable portion of the superstitions in our literature, science, and religion, were derived from the school of heathen mythology.” The account continued, “In fact, the lecture was a grand affair, and deserves great praise. There is no doubt but Prof. Green is a gifted and talented man. As a political speaker, we must say, we have never heard his equal in Philadelphia.” *The Recorder* concluded, “At the close of the lecture, Mr. J. C. White, Jr., read a question for debate,” which was, ‘Will the enlistment of colored men advance their political and social rights?’ The disputants were Messrs. Sipsion, Weir, McCimb, and Bowers.”³⁹²

In 1865, the institute celebrated its twelfth anniversary. “The anniversary celebration of this classical and well-known Institution came off on last Monday night, the 2d instant, according to arrangement, at the National Hall, Market street, above Twelfth. The Hall was completely crowded, at an early hour. Mr. J. C. White, Jr., the worthy and efficient Chairman, called the meeting to order, and opened the exercises for the evening by calling on Rev. Jeremiah Turpin, from Allegheny, who delivered a most beautiful and appropriate prayer. Mr. White then arose and addressed the audience with a few potent and pithy remarks, after which the several letters received were read to the audience by Mr. Taylor. Mr. O. C. Catto, one of the teachers connected with the High School, delivered a very able address, and one that was a credit to the mind and heart of the speaker. The colored Band from Camp William Penn discoursed some very fine and eloquent music on the occasion. Professor Bassett read letters from Mr. Fred. Douglass and Hon. Charles Sumner, stating the cause of their absence.”³⁹³



A boy and his dog, 1921. Photo from LancasterHistory.org. Used with permission.

After the Civil War ended, the Banneker Institute, represented by Octavius V. Catto, presented the “regimental flag” to the 24th United States Colored Troops. Little more than one year later, the organization passed a resolution, “Set[ting] forth the feelings of the colored people very clearly. They demand impartial suffrage, eulogize the majority in Congress and criticize the Constitutional Amendment recently passed. This institute contains some of the most able colored men in Philadelphia, among whom are White, Adger, Catto, Lacount, and others.” In the Recorder of March 9, 1867, a notice appeared, announcing, “Miss Fanny M. Jackson Female

Principal of the Institute for Colored Youth, will lecture under the auspices of the Banneker Institute , on Thursday evening, March 14th, 1867, at Liberty hall, Lombard Street below Eighth. Subject: ‘Industry and Economy, the Guardians of Individual and National Wealth.’ Tickets of admission, 25 cents. For sale at 713 Lombard Street, by the Members of the Institute, and at the door on the evening of the Lecture. Doors open at 7 o'clock. Lecture to commence at 8 o'clock.”³⁹⁴

By the late 19th century, African American literary societies in Pennsylvania had grown in number and popularity. The April 6, 1882, edition *Christian Recorder* listed the weekly events conducted under its auspices which were diverse and represented cultural undertakings and social activism.: “Literary Society of Morris Brown Mission will give its annual concert on Thursday evening, April 20th” and “The Historical Literary of Allen Chapel will hold a meeting on Monday week to express the indignation of the colored people at the treatment of Bishop Payne by the railroad authorities in the South.” The edition also noted, “Bethel Literary held a memorial meeting last Tuesday evening on the life-services of Mr. Geo. Ware and Rev. Henry Highland Garnet,” during which “Preliminary addresses were made by Mr. J. Ramsey, Mr. Robert Holland and Mr. W. Still.”³⁹⁵

In Pittsburgh, a similar dynamic unfolded, according to J. Ernest Wright. “In the last decade of the 19th century and the first years of the 20th century, many clubs sprang up,” wrote Wright, “such as the “Wylie Avenue Literary Society of the 1890’s” which “had three hundred members” that met “monthly to listen to lectures on Temperance and similar subjects.” Wright also noted that, “as the Homewood-Brushton Negro community grew, the Homewood Social and Literary Club” also grew along with it, as did the “Emma J. Moore Literary and Art Circle, and the Booker T. Washington Literary Society of Carson Street Baptist Church.”³⁹⁶

In 1894, in Pittsburgh, six women founded what is now the longest-lived African American women’s club in western Pennsylvania. Chartered as the Aurora Club, its purpose was to

Pursue a systematic course of study in a manner to be decided by a majority of the membership, and shall be for the mutual improvement of the membership in literature, art, science, and matters relating to the vital interests of the day.³⁹⁷

These pioneering black women understood the significance of the times in which they lived and the importance of the social and political issues that shaped their lives. A few were materially comfortable; they all knew hard work. In an age when lynchings were common and the cultural-uplift theory of improvement of the race through improvement of the individual was “the major strategy for Negro survival by both races”, they all keenly felt a burden of responsibility as black

women to “improve themselves intellectually” and to work for the good of all black Pennsylvanians.³⁹⁸

They already held active community roles. They were all active church members. They were all organizers and leaders. Rachel Lovett Jones, the founder of the club, was, among other things the organizer and first president of the Home for Working Girls located on Francis Street, a “shelter and bridge for young women coming in to the city in search of domestic or personal service jobs typically available to Negro women at the turn of the century.”³⁹⁹ Mrs Lovett was also a charter member of the Home for Aged and Infirm Colored Women (later the Lemington Home), and served on numerous boards of social and charitable organizations. Frances Golden was married to Dr John Paul Golden, the first surgeon licensed to practice in Pittsburgh. Mrs Golden was active in civic matters throughout her life, including leadership as a board member for the Home for Aged and Infirm Colored Women. Anna Posey was artist who came from Athens, Ohio, where she was the first black teacher in a white school in Ohio. She too was a community educator and organizer of the Working Girls on Francis Street. Virginia Wilson Proctor was the first African American businesswoman to own a business in downtown Pittsburgh. Hannah Grinage Lovett was the wife of a successful businessman and used her position to actively support numerous religious and civic organizations. Cora V. Hill was a custodian; she also served on the board of the Home for Aged and Infirm Colored Women.

Members met at each others’ homes and early subjects of study tended to focus on literature and poetry, and to be more emotional in their tone, such as “a day with nature” or “let us love one another.” But as membership increased the agenda took a more activist turn. Aurora’s interests broadened to include “Pittsburgh history, the study of women’s organizations, music, and eventually the N.A.A.C.P., health, race relations, Negro history, and all forms of charity and religion.”⁴⁰⁰ Aurora members were avid users of the Carnegie Libraries. Members learned from each other, through intergroup activities with groups such as the Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs, and they involved themselves with local, national and world issues of their times. As a group and in collaboration with other organizations they pushed open doors closed by segregation.

The Aurora Club always remained a support group for its members, providing intellectual stimulation, collegiality and comfort, and a place to share commonplace feelings and common identities. At the 100th anniversary meeting of Aurora, the great-granddaughter of founder Anna Posey gave the keynote address. Herself a Ph.D. in child psychology and activist in the tradition of her great-grandmother, Nancy Boxhill captured the legacy of Aurora for its generations of members:

Look at our history. Pack a tradition of intellect, history, a sense of humor, and gusto. Moving on ... what to leave behind? It’s a

matter of choice, to mark our place. ... A sense of relationships as a guiding force in our lives. Insight, for eyesight, competitive spirit, know what is right and what is wrong. African American women have this intrinsic sense. Leave it behind. Transformation—any situation can be transformed. We can set right what is wrong. That is who we are as a people. We can take it or leave it behind. When our bags are fully packed we fill in one little hole for the next generation. ... Take what is important to you. You are charting a path for those who come after.⁴⁰¹

Higher Education

Access to higher education has historically been associated with upper and professional middle classes, and certainly entry into the professional middle class almost always has required a college degree. Thus the closure of almost all of Pennsylvania's colleges to African Americans placed a serious obstacle in the way of anyone with aspirations to a college degree. With the establishment of two black institutions of higher education in the Commonwealth, black Pennsylvanians had another autonomous institutional support capable of producing future leaders concerned with the well-being of their people.

Cheyney University traces its roots to the founding of the Institute for Colored Youth in 1837. It acquired the farm of George Cheyney in Thornbury Township, bordering Chester and Delaware counties in 1902. After the school moved to the new location the following year, it kept its name until July 1914, when it officially became known as Cheyney Training School for Teachers; it was open to male and female students. Cheyney's principal and president from 1913 until 1951 was Leslie Pinckney Hill, an African American educator who earned an M.A. in education from Harvard University and formerly taught English at Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee Institute in the early 20th century. Hill published two collections of his poetry, *The Wings of Oppression* (1921) and *Touissant L' Ouverture: A Dramatic History* (1928).⁴⁰²

According to a report issued by the U.S. Office of Education in 1917, *Negro Education*, for which Thomas Jesse Jones composed the entry on Cheyney after visiting the school in 1914 and 1915, the college "offered well-planned courses in teacher training, household arts, and manual training." The report listed the school's attendance as "87; all secondary; male 22, female 65" and noted that "twenty-two of the pupils were from Pennsylvania." Under the heading "Teachers and Workers," thirteen of the fourteen were listed as "colored" and one as "white." Of the "colored," five were male and nine were female; all were cited as being "well trained." In the breakdown of the schooling of the students at Cheyney, it was recorded in two categories "preparatory" and "normal."⁴⁰³

The first of these groups, “preparatory,” were students “completing the two years of high-school work necessary to enter the normal department” and the courses they took included “English, algebra, history, civics, physiology, nature study, and some industrial training.” The students in the “normal” classes “specialize[d] in household arts, manual training or teacher training for elementary schools.” Cheyney was developing a course in agriculture at the time. Its summer program “attracted teachers from many Southern States,” and an “effort has been made to carry on neighborhood work among the colored people of West Chester, a town 5 miles away.” Noting both the worth and the nature of the properties that had been erected on the grounds, Jones wrote their “estimated value” was \$80,000. Most of the buildings were constructed of stone, including the “administration building, girl’s dormitory, industrial building, and the Carnegie Library,” while other edifices were “three cottages, a farmhouse, a barn, poultry house and dairy,” all of which were “in good repair and the rooms were well kept.”⁴⁰⁴

In 1922, while the school would become certified as a “Normal School” by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, a great debate ensued lasting several years, and which was mentioned in the 1927 *Negro Survey of Pennsylvania*, as having been “a continuous protest on the part of Negroes all over the Commonwealth” against the inclusion in their Normal School system. This was because, the authors of the survey asserted, “Their chief objection is that it gives the Commonwealth sanction to individual municipalities to institute separation in their public school system.” Vincent P. Franklin commented on this situation by assessing the “damage control” Leslie Pinckney Hill undertook to validate his reasons for making this change. In fact, Hill sent his argument to the *Crisis*, the official organ of the NAACP, which published it in 1923, one year after the school became part of Pennsylvania’s normal school system. He contended it was foolish to think that he was promoting segregation because “the whole weight of this school has been exerted against these evils.” He and the decision of his administrators to make this move were based upon “self-determination” which he believed to be “the very essence of democracy.” The year 1923 proved pivotal in elevating the school’s stature with a talk by W. E. B. Du Bois and Mary Church Terrell serving as commencement speaker, signaling that the school was considered a first-rate establishment. In the following year, noted African American artist Henry Ossawa Tanner was commissioned by the institution’s Richard Humphreys Foundation to create one of his seminal works of art, *Nicodemus Coming to Christ*.⁴⁰⁵

In 1930, according to the school’s history, “the State Council of Education approved extension of the curriculum in elementary education, home economics and industrial arts to lead to the degree of Bachelor of Science in Education” and, two years later, “the first bachelor of science in education degree was awarded in home economics.” In spring 1951, after becoming fully accredited by the Middle States Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools, Cheyney changed its name to Cheyney State Teachers College and eight years later dropped the word “Teachers.” Two momentous events worth noting are the creation, in 1968, of the first graduate

program and in 1983, after being admitted into the State System of Higher Education, the school changed its name to what it is known by today: Cheyney University.⁴⁰⁶

The list of Cheyney's distinguished alumni includes a number of prominent individuals in their fields, including: Julian Abele, who graduated from the school in 1896 when it was still known as the Institute of Colored Youth, and who designed more than 200 buildings, including the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia Free Library, and many of the buildings on the campus of Duke University; Ed Bradley, distinguished CBS news journalist and former radio journalist who graduated with a degree in education in 1964; Lieutenant General Ronald S. Coleman, the Deputy Commandant for Manpower and Reserve Affairs for the United States Marine Corps, who graduated in 1973; and Bayard Rustin who, although he had dropped out in 1937 to move to New York City, spent three of his formative years, from 1934 to 1937, being educated at Cheyney on his way to becoming a foremost figure in the national Civil Rights movement as a central advisor to Martin Luther King Jr., aiding him in the ideology and teachings of pacifism.⁴⁰⁷

The second of Pennsylvania's historically black colleges, Lincoln University, followed a distinctly different path than Cheyney. On October 5, 1853, at a "meeting of Presbytery of New Castle," it was agreed by those present that, "There shall be established within our bounds, and under our supervision, an Institution, to be called the Ashmun Institute, for the Scientific, Classical and Theological education of colored youth of the male sex." The committee charged with raising funds and purchasing land for the school consisted of "J. A. Dickey, A. Hamilton," and "R. M. Du Bois," all of whom were identified as "ministers" as well as "Samuel J. Dickey and John M. Kelton, ruling elders" and it was "their duty to select a suitable site for the buildings" and procure a suitable charter from the state of Pennsylvania."⁴⁰⁸

After obtaining a charter, which had passed both chambers of the state legislature on April 14, 1854, the committee members selected a site that was a "pleasant and eligible one, in Chester Co., Pa., at a place called Hinsonville where some families of colored persons have for a number of years resided, being owners of small tracts of land." A critical reason the committee chose this area, however, was also that it "lies in a central position to three Presbyterian Congregations of New London, Fagg's manor, and Oxford."⁴⁰⁹

A series of newspaper articles published from the mid- to late 19th century, chronicles the development of the school from its proposed roots as a training ground for teachers and ministers who, in some cases, were sent abroad so that "Africa might be evangelized," to its beginnings as a purely theological and liberal arts college. In an 1857 article in the *West Chester American Republican*, the school's mission and that of the Presbyterian Church which ran it, were praised by the local white residents because they believed that "the elevation of the degraded African" and the sending of such individuals to Africa was "practical philanthropy." This was a better

alternative, the newspaper argued, than embracing the policies of the “hot-headed abolitionists” who the author claimed “defame the living and slander the virtuous dead.”⁴¹⁰



William Creditt, President of Lincoln University, n.d.
From Temple University, Blockson Archives. Used
with permission.

A decade later, and only one year after the Civil War ended, the name and mission of the college had changed, evidenced by an article published by the *American Republican* on the commencement exercises of July 1866. In it, it was stated of the Ashmun Institute that “Its name has recently been altered to Lincoln University and Ashmun Institute” and “its object is to educate young colored men for the ministry, and as teachers for their own race in the South and elsewhere.” Describing the campus, the writer noted “the three buildings constituting the University are beautifully located on one of those gentle, swelling eminences” and “on all sides the outlook is upon those splendid farms, undulating fields, beautiful groves, and comfortable farm houses.” The commencement speaker was the head of the Freedmen’s Bureau, Major General O. O. Howard, whose oration was entitled

“Onward and Upward.” After the diplomas were handed out, “the college choir gave us more of their pleasant music.”⁴¹¹

In the following year, the local *Oxford Press* commented upon the graduation festivities, and it touted that the school’s enrollment was now up to 90 students (up from 46 in the previous year). Moreover, the newspaper included a history of the school’s first thirteen years that had been taken from a work recently written by a former graduate, William D. Johnson. In Johnson’s chronicle of the schools development, he stated that by 1863, 19 students were enrolled at the fledgling school, of which “fourteen of these were preparing for the ministry, four of whom were licensed by the Episcopal, Methodist and Presbyterian Churches. Of the alumni, twelve have entered the ministry of the Methodist, Presbyterian and Baptist churches, including three missionaries, whose arrival in Africa enabled our Foreign Mission to form the first Old School Presbytery.” Johnson continued, “After the war, it was determined to enlarge the building so as to accommodate the increasing demand for admission. ‘Lincoln Hall’ was then erected directly in front of and attached to ‘Ashmun Hall.’”⁴¹²

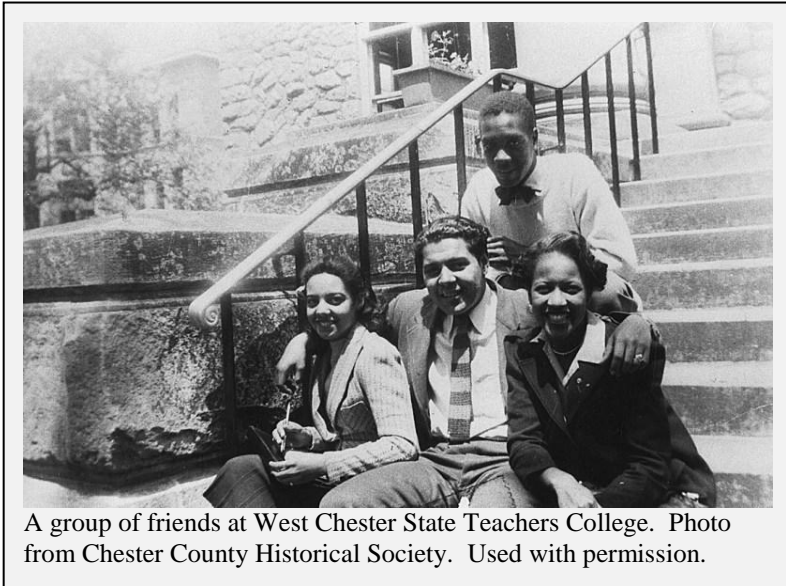
Johnson's description of Lincoln hall is informative. "It is built of fine brick and is four stories in height," he wrote. "The entrance to it is in the center, a door opening into a long hall, on either side of which are arranged the office, recession room, private parlor, recitation and reading rooms, and the laboratory. On the second floor are the library, recreation rooms, and the chapel, which are tastefully arranged and will seat two hundred students." He concluded his history by writing that the enrollment at Lincoln was beginning to surge. "Here in this institution," he continued, "are the men who entered the batteries of Port Hudson and stormed Fort Fisher. Here are the men who assaulted Wagner and charged up Honey Hill. They have served the country as slaves and as soldiers, and they are now preparing to serve it as free, enlightened citizens."⁴¹³

In June 1873, the dynamics of the school changed once again. An article in the *Oxford Press* on Lincoln's commencement exercises included a breakdown of the graduates in a number of new departments. Among them were eighteen male graduates who been conferred a bachelor of arts degree, including John H. Adams, Richmond, Virginia; William H. Ash, Providence, Rhode Island; William H. Bell, Washington, D.C.; William H. Chambers, Baltimore, Maryland; and Joseph N. Clinton, Philadelphia; Abraham P. Denny, West Chester, Solomon P. Hood, Chesterville, and William Robeson, Warren Tavern, Pennsylvania. In addition, the university granted an M.A. and it conferred the degree on Samuel J. Bamfield, William E. Brooks, William F. Dickerson, Jesse Gould, William R. Templeton, and Joseph C. Waters. The article noted that Lincoln had instituted a medical department with a distinguished faculty, and was looking forward to conferring degrees upon the new enrollees to its program.⁴¹⁴

In 1915, when the school was visited by Thomas Jesse Jones, Lincoln's development into a liberal arts and sciences institution, with a seminary for training ministers, was essentially complete. Jones described Lincoln as "a school or college and secondary grade with a theological department" in which the "emphasis of the course is largely classical and literature." The college enjoyed an enrollment of 162 students in 1915 in the "secondary and college" program and 54 in the "theological" department. The breakdown of the students' places of origin was diverse: "the geographical distribution of the larger groups of students is as follows: Georgia 26, Pennsylvania 25, Virginia 25, West Indies 23, North Carolina 22, South Carolina 19, Maryland 16, New Jersey 12." It was noted that "the remaining students come from 14 states and 3 foreign countries."⁴¹⁵

Of the fourteen teachers at Lincoln, twelve were "white" and two were identified as "colored." All were male. An examination of "the distribution of students according to subjects in the four-year course" reveals the following: "Bible 118, English 104, Latin 96, Greek 69, mathematics 69, physics, 49, history 45, German 41, geology 37, psychology and philosophy 34, chemistry 28, biology 23, Spanish 13, teaching methods 11, hygiene and sanitation 6, and practice teaching 2." The Theological Department offered "Biblical archeology, theology, sacred geography,

ecclesiastical Latin, English Bible, Hebrew, Aramaic, exegesis, homiletics,” and “church history.” The study appraised the value of the buildings on campus at \$283,250, which included “nine substantial brick buildings, a central heating and lighting plant, and 10 residences for professors” and noted that “all are in fairly good repair.”⁴¹⁶



Lincoln University has graduated a number of noteworthy individuals, including Dr. Nathan F. Mossell (1879), “the first Black graduate of the University of Pennsylvania (M.D. in 1882); the first Black to be admitted to the Philadelphia Medical Society (in 1885); and first Black to found a hospital and training school for nurses primarily for blacks in the city of Philadelphia—Frederick Douglass Memorial Hospital (1895)”;

Thurgood Marshall (1930), the first African American

Supreme Court Justice and legal advocate for the NAACP in the 1930s where his 1935 victory in a case concerning the admittance of an African American student at the University of Maryland Law School was critical in getting the ball rolling for subsequent challenges to *Plessy v.*

Ferguson, such as the *Brown v. Topeka, Kansas Board of Education* case of which he would also win; and the first presidents of both Nigeria and Ghana, Nnamdi Azikiwe (1930) and Kwame Nkrumah (1939), respectively.⁴¹⁷

Newspapers and the press

Complementing education, African-American newspapers became an important vehicle for supporting and advancing the cause of social justice. Newspapers informed readers throughout the state about the status of their civil and political rights. African-American newspapers brought vital information to black communities throughout the commonwealth. The *Philadelphia Tribune* and the *Pittsburgh Courier*, both 20th century papers, helped to mobilize the educated black middle class toward reform and served as a counterweight to the white press.

Editors John Russwurm and Samuel Cornish debuted *Freedom’s Journal* (New York City) on March 16, 1827 with a call to action in their words “We wish to plead our own cause. Too long have others spoken for us. Too long has the public been deceived by misrepresentation in things which concern us dearly.” So began the first African American-owned and operated weekly newspaper whose intent was not only to express abolitionist views, but as a vehicle for

discussion and debate concerning all areas of concern to African Americans. In fact, the editors stated that it was their “earnest wish” for the journal to become “a medium of intercourse between our brethren in the different states of this great confederacy.”⁴¹⁸ The *Journal*, the *Weekly Advocate* and others started a trend of African American newspapers that while focused on the community, family, racial pride, more importantly provided a vehicle for commentary and discussion, not just general news.⁴¹⁹ Articles in these papers “helped to focus and feed discontent, build group solidarity, legitimize movement leaders, groups, and activities, and ...disseminate ideology.”⁴²⁰ During the early to mid 19th century, approximately forty black newspapers appeared in northern cities, including New York City, Albany, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, and Columbus. Plagued by inadequate funds and a small audience base, many folded before the Civil War.

The mainstay of the black community, the church and its congregation, often published their own newspapers. The African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME)’s *Christian Recorder* started as a protest newspaper in Pittsburgh called *The Mystery*, renamed the *Christian Herald* in 1848, and became the *Christian Recorder* in 1852 when it moved to Philadelphia. Not only did it report religious and secular news, but promoted national unity and community. While other black newspapers were often dependent on financial support from both the white and black communities, the *Recorder* was financially autonomous. Today it is the oldest continuously published black newspaper in the United States.

With growing literacy and expanded black subscription base, black publishing blossomed during and after during Reconstruction (1865-1876), with an estimated 575 publications by 1890.⁴²¹ Black newspapers now needed to focus on the struggle against segregation, disfranchisement and lynching. Leading the way was Ida B. Wells, an African American journalist, suffragist and co-owner and editor of *Free Speech and Headlight*, an anti-segregationist newspaper based at the Beale Street Baptist Church in Memphis, Tennessee.

One of the first black newspapers to obtain commercial success was Robert S. Abbott’s *Chicago Defender* founded in 1905. Taking a cue from the William Randolph Hearst’s sensationalist practice of delivering the news, the *Defender* by 1920 had a circulation of 283,571.⁴²² It was so popular and well read that its’ “The Great Northern Drive” on May 15, 1917 “was credited with causing a mass migration north of blacks seeking to escape the iniquities and brutality them being heaped upon them by members of the Ku Klux Klan and by other Southern racists.”⁴²³ Its chief rival, the *Pittsburgh Courier*, was established in 1907 by Edwin Harleston, and gained national distinction in 1910 under the leadership of Robert L. Vann. By 1937, the *Courier*’s weekly circulation was approximately 250,000; by the mid 1940s it had produced 14 local and national editions, and had branch offices in 12 cities; and found great success with its adoption of its “Double V” campaign soon after the attack on Pearl Harbor, wherein the editors wrote, “we call upon the President and Congress to declare war on Japan and against racial prejudice in our

country. Certainly we should be strong enough to whip both of them.”⁴²⁴ By 1947 the *Courier* reached a record circulation for black newspapers of 357,212.⁴²⁵ “From 1900 to the Civil Rights Movement of the late 1950s, black papers thrived in almost every city because the mainstream press still ignored African Americans or portrayed them stereotypically, often as the perpetrators of crimes.”⁴²⁶ Ironically, during late 1950s and 1960s, the black press struggled to keep readership, mainly because white newspapers were now reporting black issues and began hiring black journalists to work for the mainstream papers.

The *Philadelphia Tribune*, the oldest black publication in the United States, was founded by Chris J. Perry in 1884. It was “a paper of the people and for the people. It is the organ of no clique or class. As its name indicates, its purpose is to lead its readers to appreciate their best interests and to suggest the best means for attaining deserved ends”⁴²⁷

Notes

³³⁷ *South Carolina Gazette*, July 18, 1740; see also Kate Van Winkle Keller *Dance and its Music in America*, 571; Nash, *Forging Freedom*, 19; and Vincent P. Franklin, *The Education of Black Philadelphia: The Social and Educational History of a Minority Community, 1900-1950*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1979, 29.

³³⁸ *South Carolina Gazette*, July 18, 1740.

³³⁹ Nash, *Forging Freedom*, 22; Franklin, *Education of Black Philadelphia*, 29; Nash and Soderlund, *Freedom By Degrees*, 156.

³⁴⁰ Franklin, *Education of Black Philadelphia*, 29-30; Du Bois, *Philadelphia Negro*, 84.

³⁴¹ Lane, *William Dorsey's Philadelphia*, 136-137; Du Bois, *Philadelphia Negro*, 87.

³⁴² Lane, *William Dorsey's Philadelphia*, 137.

³⁴³ Franklin, *Education of Black Philadelphia*, 30-31; See also Vanessa Julye's web essay “Cyrus Bustill, 1732-18-04’ on the Friends’ General Conference web site: www.fgcquaker.org/fit-for-freedom/cyrus-bustill and Margaret Hope Bacon's essay “The Pennsylvania Abolition Society's Mission for Black Education,” available on the Historical Society of Pennsylvania's website at <http://www.hsp.org/default.aspx?id=818>.

³⁴⁴ Franklin, *Education of Black Philadelphia*, 31; Nash, *Forging Freedom*, 204.

³⁴⁵ These individuals are profiled in Julie Winch, ed., *The Elite of Our People: Joseph Wilson's Sketches of Black Upper Class Life in Antebellum Philadelphia*, University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000.

³⁴⁶ “An Address, Delivered at Bethel Church, Philadelphia; on the 30th of September, 1818” in Aptheker, *A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States*, 73; see also Julie Winch, *A Gentleman of Colour*, 192.

³⁴⁷ “An Address, Delivered at Bethel Church,” 192-193.

³⁴⁸ Hope-Bacon, “The Pennsylvania Abolition Society.” HSP.

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- ³⁴⁹ Harry Silcox, "Delay and Neglect: Negro Public Education in Antebellum Philadelphia, 1800-1860," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 97 (October 1973), 444-464; See also Franklin, *Education of Black Philadelphia*, 32-40; Du Bois, *The Philadelphia Negro*, 83-88
- ³⁵⁰ *Liberator*, Vol. 2, No. 8, February 25, 1832, p. 32 in Dorothy Porter, *Early Negro Writing, 1760-1837*, 120-122; see also Glasco, *The WPA History of the Negro in Pittsburgh*, 240-241 and Robert Steven Levine, *Martin Delany*, 25.
- ³⁵¹ Ann G. Wilmoth, "19th Century Education in Pittsburgh, Allegheny City: Path Toward Equality?" in David McBride, *Blacks in Pennsylvania History: Research and Educational Perspectives*, 6; Glasco, "Double Burden: The Black Experience in Pittsburgh," in Hays, *City at the Point*, 73.
- ³⁵² *Pittsburgh Gazette*, February 7th, 1837.
- ³⁵³ Glasco, *WPA History*, 242; Connie Perdreau, *A Black History of Athens County and Ohio University*, Athens: Ohio University Press, 1988, 1-7.
- ³⁵⁴ Glasco, *WPA History*, 242-243.
- ³⁵⁵ Margaret Hope Bacon, *But One Race: The Life of Robert Purvis*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007, 121-122.
- ³⁵⁶ *Liberator*, December 16, 1853; see also Aptheker, *A Documentary History of the Negro People*, 360.
- ³⁵⁷ James Pyle Wickersham, *A History of Education in Pennsylvania*, New York: Arno Press, 1969, 494-507; Silcox, "Delay and Neglect," 455-464.
- ³⁵⁸ Emerson I. Moss, *African-Americans in the Wyoming Valley 1778-1990*. Wilkes-Barre: Wyoming Historical and Geological Society and Wilkes University Press, 1992, 68.
- ³⁵⁹ Ibid.
- ³⁶⁰ Edward J. Price, Jr., "School Segregation in 19th Century Pennsylvania," in *Pennsylvania History*, 43, 1976, 133-135.
- ³⁶¹ Du Bois, *Philadelphia Negro*, 93-94; Franklin, "'Voice of the Black Community'," *The Philadelphia Tribune*, 1912-1941," in *Pennsylvania History*, 272.
- ³⁶² Franklin, "'Voice of the Black Community,'" 272; Davison M. Douglas, "Limits of Law Accomplishing Racial Change: School Segregation in the Pre-Brown North," *UCLA Law Review*, Vol. 44, 1996, 727; Franklin, *The Education of Black Philadelphia*, 137; Harry Reed Burch's *Problems in American Democracy: Political, Economic, Social*, New York: Macmillan, 1922; *Philadelphia Tribune*, January 14, 1932.
- ³⁶³ Douglas, "Limits of Law Accomplishing Racial Change," 727-728; Franklin, *The Education of Black Philadelphia*, 137-141.
- ³⁶⁴ Douglas, "Limits of Law Accomplishing Racial Change," 728.
- ³⁶⁵ Davison M. Douglass' *Jim Crow Moves North: The Battle Over Northern School Segregation, 1865-1964*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005, 174.
- ³⁶⁶ For an excellent overview of the history of the school, see Jeanita Richardson's recently published *The Full-Service Community School Movement: Lessons from the James Adams Community School*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.
- ³⁶⁷ *Village Record*, January 25, 1906; *Coatesville Record*, "Negro History Week," February 10, 1953. These and all of the subsequent Coatesville area newspaper articles that will appear in the following pages can also be found

at the Chester County Historical Society in its clippings files under the headings “Black History,” “James Adams School” and “Coatesville, Schools,” as well as in a special collection folder pertaining to the school in which dozens of programs, pamphlets and broadsides are available.

³⁶⁸ Richardson, *The Full-Service Community School Movement*; *Coatesville Record*, June 7, 1932.

³⁶⁹ *Coatesville Record*, February 23, 1933, June 10, 1934.

³⁷⁰ *Coatesville Record*, June 15, 1938.

³⁷¹ *Coatesville Record*, April 10, 1942.

³⁷² *Coatesville Record*, June 8, 1944.

³⁷³ *Coatesville Record*, October 5, 1944, October 10, 1946; October 24, 1950.

³⁷⁴ *Coatesville Record*, March 22, 1954, February 2, 1935, May 22, 1952; May 27, 1952.

³⁷⁵ *Coatesville Record*, May 26, 1955, June 9, 1955.

³⁷⁶ *Pittsburgh Courier*, “Supt. Sees Harmony in Coatesville Plan to Integrate Schools,” January 7, 1956; *New York Times*, Sep. 10, 1957.

³⁷⁷ Weise, Andrew, *Places of Their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century*. (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003).

³⁷⁸ *Freedom’s Journal*, “Extract from an Address Delivered Before the Colored Reading Society of Philadelphia ” December 26, 1828. See also Elizabeth McHenry, *Forgotten Readers: Recovering the Lost History of African-American Literary Societies* Durham: Duke University Press, 2002, 49-52 and Jacqueline Bacon’s *Freedom’s Journal: The First African-American Newspaper*, Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007, 85.

³⁷⁹ *Freedom’s Journal*, “Extract,” December 26, 1828.

³⁸⁰ Ibid.

³⁸¹ Ibid.

³⁸² *Liberator*, December 3, 1831; See also Erica Armstrong Dunbar’s *A Fragile Freedom: African-American Women and Emancipation in the Antebellum City*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008, 101-102 and McHenry, *Forgotten Readers*, 57-68.

³⁸³ *Liberator*, December 3, 1831.

³⁸⁴ *The Liberator*, July 21, 1832, 114; See also McHenry, *Forgotten Readers*, 59 and Marie Lindhorst, “Politics in a Box,” Sarah Mapps Douglass and the Female Literary Association, 1831-1833,” in *Pennsylvania History*, vol. 65, no. 7, Summer, 1998, 262-278.

³⁸⁵ *Hazards Register*, March 16, 1833, XI, 186; Aptheker, 138-139; Elizabeth McHenry, “‘An Association of Kindred Spirits’: Black Readers and their Reading Rooms,” in Thomas Augst and Kenneth E. Carpenter, *Institutions of Reading: The Social Life of Libraries in the United States*, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007, 104-105.

³⁸⁶ Levine, *Martin Delany* 25; Glasco, *WPA History*, 56, 86-89, 293; McHenry, 344; See also Dorothy Sterling, *The Making of an Afro-American: Martin Robinson Delany, 1812-1885*, New York: DeCapo Press, 45-46.

³⁸⁷ Wright and Holmes in Glasco, *WPA History*, 94; R.J.M. Blackett, in Trotter and Smith’s *Shifting Historical Perspectives*, 149; McHenry, *Forgotten Readers*, 110-11.

³⁸⁸ *Colored American*, Sep. 2, 1837.

³⁸⁹ Ibid.

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- ³⁹⁰ Ibid.
- ³⁹¹ Emma Jones-Lapansky, “‘Discipline to the Mind’: Philadelphia’s Banneker Institute, 1854-1872, *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 117, 83; Tony Martin, “The Banneker Literary Institute of Philadelphia: African American Intellectual Activism before the War of the Slaveholders’ Rebellion,” *The Journal of African-American History*, Vol. 87, Summer 2002, 303-322.
- ³⁹² AME *Christian Recorder*, January 24, 1863; February, 14, 1863.
- ³⁹³ AME *Christian Recorder*, January 7, 1865.
- ³⁹⁴ AME *Christian Recorder*, April 22, 1865; July 21, 1866; March 9, 1867.
- ³⁹⁵ AME *Christian Recorder*, April 6, 1882.
- ³⁹⁶ Wright in Glasco, *WPA History*, 295.
- ³⁹⁷ “The Aurora Reading Club, a History,” 100th Year Anniversary Commemorative Booklet, 1994, np (provided by Mary H. Page, Chair of the History Committee).
- ³⁹⁸ “The Aurora Reading Club, a History,” and “The History of the Aurora Reading Club,” no date, (photocopy provided by Mary H. Page), p 6.
- ³⁹⁹ “The Aurora Reading Club,” np.
- ⁴⁰⁰ “The History of the Aurora Reading Club,” 7.
- ⁴⁰¹ “Aurora Reading Club: Onward to the Next Century,” *New Pittsburgh Courier*, October 15, 1994, p B-1.
- ⁴⁰² Charlene Howard Conyers’ *A Living Legend: The History of Cheyney University, 1837-1951*, Philadelphia: Cheyney University Press, 1990; Leslie Pinckney Hill” in Emmanuel S. Nelson’s *African-American Dramatists: An A to Z Guide*, Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 217-222. See also Patricia C. Williams, “A Historical Case Study of Cheyney and Lincoln Universities,” in Mary Beth Gasman and Christopher L. Tudico’s *Historically Black Colleges and Universities: Triumphs, Troubles and Taboos*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, 77-78 and “History of Cheyney University” in *Cheyney University Undergraduate Catalogue*, 2004-2006; 5.
- ⁴⁰³ Thomas Jesses Jones, *Negro Education : A Study of the Private and Higher Schools For Colored People in the United States*, Bulletin 1916, no. 39, Washington: Government Printing Office, 1917; 691.
- ⁴⁰⁴ Ibid., 691-692.
- ⁴⁰⁵ *Negro Survey of Pennsylvania*. Pennsylvania Department of Welfare, Harrisburg, 1928, 85; Leslie Pinckney Hill, “The Cheyney Training School for Teachers,” *The Crisis*, 26, April 1923, 252-254; Marcia M. Matthews, *Henry Ossawa Tanner, American Artist*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994, 187; Adolf L. Reed, *W.E.B. Du Bois and American Political Thought: Fabianism and the Color Line*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, 74-75.
- ⁴⁰⁶ “History of Cheyney University” in *Cheyney University Undergraduate Catalogue*, 2004-2006, pp.5-6; Conyers, *A Living Legend: The History of Cheyney University*, 169-214.
- ⁴⁰⁷ Conyers, *A Living Legend: The History of Cheyney University*.
- ⁴⁰⁸ Pamphlet entitled “Ashmun Institute,” and dated October 5th, 1853. Found at Lincoln University, Langston Hughes Library Special Collections, and also in the Lincoln University/HBCU Library Alliance Digital Collections at <http://contentdm.auctr.edu/cdm4/browse.php?CISOROOT=%2Fflupa>.

- ⁴⁰⁹ Ibid., See also Marian H. and Paul A. Russo's book which was mentioned in Chapter 3, *Hinsonville: A Community at the Crossroads: The Story Of A 19th-Century African-American Village*. Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 2005.
- ⁴¹⁰ Pamphlet entitled "Ashmun Institute," October 5th, 1853; *American Republican*, January 27, 1857.
- ⁴¹¹ *American Republican*, July 3, 1866.
- ⁴¹² *Oxford Press*, June 26, 1867.
- ⁴¹³ Ibid.
- ⁴¹⁴ *Oxford Press*, June 19, 1873.
- ⁴¹⁵ Thomas Jesses Jones, *Negro Education*, 689-690.
- ⁴¹⁶ Ibid., 690-691.
- ⁴¹⁷ "Lincoln University: A Legacy of Producing Leaders," <http://www.lincoln.edu/distinctions.html>. For more historical context on Lincoln, see Horace Mann Bond's *Education For Freedom: A History of Lincoln University*, Pennsylvania, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976.
- ⁴¹⁸ Cornish and Russwurm, "To Our Patrons," quoted in Jacqueline Bacon, "The History of Freedom's Journal: A Study in Empowerment and Community," *Journal of African American History*, Vol. 88, No. 1 (Winter, 2003), p. 4. Black periodicals, such as the *Mirror of Liberty* (1837) and the *Anglo-African Magazine* (1859) also championed abolition.
- ⁴¹⁹ Gayle K. Berardi and Thomas W. Segady, "The Development of African-American Newspapers in the American West: A Sociohistorical Perspective," *The Journal of Negro History* Vol. 75 ¾ (Summer – Autumn, 1990), pp. 96-97. African American newspapers included the *African Journal*, *National Philanthropist*, *Palladium of Liberty*, *The Demosthenian Shield*, *The Rights of All*, *The Colored American* (1837-1842), *Alienated American* (1853-1854), *Anglo-African Magazine* (1859-1865), *Elevator*, *Daily*, and Frederick Douglass' *North Star*. African American newspapers published in Pennsylvania include *National Reformer* (Philadelphia), *Black Suburban Journal*, *The Lincolnian*, *Christian Banner* (Philadelphia), *Defender* (Philadelphia), *New Pittsburgh Courier*, and the *Philadelphia Tribune*.
- ⁴²⁰ Charlotte O'Kelly, "The Black Press: Conservative or Radical, Reformist or Revolutionary?" *Journalism History* Vol. 4, No. 4, 114-116.
- ⁴²¹ Robert Fay, "The Story of the African American Press," *The New Crisis*, Vol. 106, No. 4 (Jul-August 1999), 46. The Associated Correspondents of Race Newspapers was formed in 1890.
- ⁴²² Ibid, 47.
- ⁴²³ Louie Robinson, The Black Newspapers and Other Journals, *Ebony*, Special Issue (August 1975), p. 56.
- ⁴²⁴ John Morton Blum, *V Was for Victory: Politics and American Culture During World War II* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1976), 208.
- ⁴²⁵ Fay, 47.
- ⁴²⁶ Fay, 47
- ⁴²⁷ I. Garland Penn, *The Afro-American Press, and its Editors*, Springfield, MA: Willey & Co., Publishers, 1891, 145.

Chapter 6

Benevolent, Fraternal and Sororal Societies, and Women's Clubs, 1644-1965

Benevolent and fraternal organizations, like literary societies, offered many opportunities for entertainment, socializing and networking, supporting local causes, and rendering community service. As with the other institutions being developed by African Americans in the state throughout the 19th century—the churches, schools, businesses—participation gave members considerable experience in developing communication and leadership skills. For black Pennsylvanians, they also quickly became platforms for social and eventually political activism.

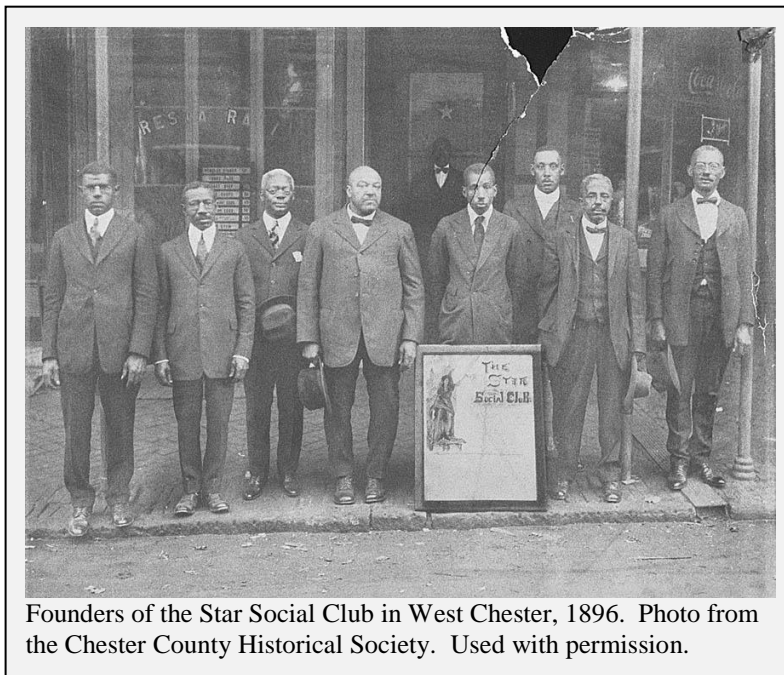
Benevolent Societies

The Free African Society, founded in Philadelphia in 1787 by Absalom Jones and Richard Allen, an organization with early religious implications, was also one of the first benevolent societies in Pennsylvania. In 1793, Allen, who had recently left its ranks because of growing theological differences with Jones, rejoined his former associate to offer help during the yellow fever epidemic. The society, after meeting on September 5 to consider an appeal for assistance by Benjamin Rush, offered aid and, according to Gary B. Nash, “nursed the sick, carried away the dead, dug graves, and transported the afflicted to an emergency lazaretto set up outside the city.”

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While the Society performed a great deal of work for Philadelphia's African American and white residents during the crisis, they were attacked in a vicious and slanderous document written by prominent publisher Mathew Carey. In *A Short Account of the Malignant Fever*, Carey contended the city's white citizens bore the brunt of the fight to aid the sick and, as such, were the ones to thank for their handling of the tragedy. Conversely, according to Gary B. Nash, he argued the African Americans who had helped (under the auspices of the Free African Society) acted malevolently during the tragedy, and believed they were guilty of “charging exorbitant fees to nurse the sick and remove the dead.” He also charged them with stealing from the victims and their families. To these charges, Allen and Jones wrote a fiery rebuttal entitled *A Narrative of the Proceedings of the Black People During the Late Awful Calamity in Philadelphia in the year 1793*, in which they proclaimed that not only had Philadelphia's African Americans met the call to help in the struggle, but they also were at the forefront of the battle and valiantly assisted all citizens in need, regardless of color..⁴²⁹

By spring 1831, the number of African American benevolent societies in Philadelphia had grown to several dozen. Their goals and number were documented in a notice published in *Hazard's Register* on March 12. A committee of African American men who had drawn up the summary of these societies included John Bowers, tailor, activist, and organist at the St. Thomas African Episcopal Church; James Cornish, sail-maker and younger sibling of Samuel Cornish, minister of the First African Presbyterian Church; and Robert C. Gordon Sr., one of the city's most prosperous fruit sellers. They issued a public statement explaining the mission of the benevolent and mutual aid societies: "We believe it to be the duty of every person to contribute as far as in their power towards alleviating the miseries, and supplying the wants, of those fellow beings who, through the many misfortunes and calamities to which human nature is subject, may become fit objects for our charity. And, whereas, from the many privations to which we as people of colour are subject, and our limited opportunity of obtaining the necessities of life many of us have been included in the number dependent on those provisions made by law, for the maintenance of the poor; therefore, as we constitute a part of the public burden, we have deeded it our duty to use such means as was in our reach to lessen its weight, among which, we have found the forming of institutions for mutual relief, the most practicable and best calculated effect of our object."⁴³⁰



Founders of the Star Social Club in West Chester, 1896. Photo from the Chester County Historical Society. Used with permission.

The committee compiled a list of the city's male and female societies, as well as the amount each had "paid out from 1830 to 1831." The sixteen male groups recorded, the dates of their founding, and the disbursements included the African Friendly Society of St. Thomas, 1795, \$76.50; Sons of Africa, 1810, \$222.00; Benezet Philanthropic, 1812, \$415.19; Benevolent Sons of Zion, 1822, \$116.99; Sons of St. Thomas, 1823, \$43.12; Harrison Benevolent, 1823, \$56.06; Coachman's Benevolent,

1825, \$212.12½; United Sons of Wilberforce, 1827, \$308.68; Tyson Benevolent, 1824, \$93.38; Union Benevolent Sons of Bethel, 1828, \$178.61; and the Citizen Sons of Philadelphia, 1830, \$18.40.⁴³¹

The men identified twenty-seven female groups which included the Female Benevolent Society of St. Thomas, 1793, \$80.84; African Female Band Benevolent Society of Bethel, 1817,

\$428.50; Female Benezet Society, 1818, \$192. 12½; Daughters of Zion Angolian Ethiopian Society, 1822, \$103.67; Daughters of Ethiopia, 1825, \$131.30; United Daughters of Wesley, 1827, \$144.78; United Sister's Society, 1828, \$208.75; and the Female Beneficial Philanthropic Society of Zoar, 1826, \$42.21.⁴³²

A decade later, in 1841, the subject was revisited by Joseph Wilson, an African American who had moved to Philadelphia in 1833 at the age of sixteen. In his work, entitled "Sketches of the Higher Classes of Colored Society in Philadelphia," Wilson remarked that "Mutual Relief Societies are numerous," adding "there are a larger number of these than of any other description, in the colored community." He also noted these societies "are generally well sustained, to the great advantage of those who compose them," and there are "also one or more others, strictly devoted to objects of out-doors benevolence. . . . The last mentioned are chiefly composed of females." The total number of benevolent societies Wilson tabulated in 1841 was 64, surpassing all of his other categories, such as literary clubs (3), debating societies (3), temperance organizations (4), and lyceums (1).⁴³³

African American benevolent societies were established throughout Pennsylvania during the 19th century, and many of their activities were noted by popular African American journals of the day. For instance, the August 19, 1865 edition of the *Christian Recorder* announced there was to be "a celebration of several benevolent societies given at Langhorn's Hill, near Attleborough, Bucks county, Pa., September 7th, 1865," and the submitters of the notice wanted to "extend an invitation to all like institutions and a generous public. . . . Dinner prepared on the ground, at 50 cents; also, feed for horses furnished on the ground." An article entitled "A Voice From Pittsburgh," published by the *Recorder* on January 14, 1865, discussed the activities of a particular "Benevolent Society" in the community: "To the poor and needy, this is no meaningless title. Like ministering angels, its members are seen visiting the hut of the poor, the bed of the afflicted, and the bereaved everywhere. Its good offices, like many Societies, are not confined to themselves, but, like the charities of God,



The ladies of the Married Women's Social and Charitable Club, c. 1925. Photo from the Westmoreland County Historical Society. Used with permission.

extend to all. On Christmas evening, they held a festival in Wilkins' Hall. The President, Mrs. Phoebe Miller, was on hand, with her usual smiles and words of cheer. Nor would we be unmindful of all the good ladies, who assisted upon that occasion.”⁴³⁴

In Pittsburgh in 1883, Mary Peck Bond established the Home for Aged and Infirm Colored Women. “Now known as the Lemington Home,” wrote Charles Franklin Lee, “it remains Pittsburgh’s longest continuously operating black institution.” In the *Forty-Third Annual Report of the Board of Commissioners of Public Charities for the State of Pennsylvania*, published in 1912, investigators “found the place overcrowded as the normal capacity is only 32 and they were caring for 35 women” but noted “the building is practically new and in a cleanly condition.” They believed the overcrowding was caused by “the low age limit for admittance, which is fifty years and upwards,” and recommended it be increased.⁴³⁵

In 1897, in Williamsport, Lycoming County, Mary Slaughter joined the ranks of women who opened such institutions when she established the Home for Aged Colored Women on Brandon Place. The 1910 *Negro Business Directory* contains a revealing entry about the entrepreneurial and compassionate African American woman:

Mrs. Mary Slaughter has been a resident of and property owner in Williamsport for many years. In 1897, having been engaged in settlement work for several years among her own people, she saw the need of a home for aged colored women. She succeeded in interesting a number of philanthropic people and with their aid purchased the present site of the home. It was remodeled in 1908 and at present time has eight occupants, the oldest being 87 years of age. The home is pleasantly situated, facing the city park, and affords great comfort to the occupants.⁴³⁶

Two years later, the *Annual Report of the Board of Commissioners of Public Charities* (which examined Bond’s Pittsburgh establishment) found Slaughter’s institution to be in “excellent condition” and “well managed by Mary Slaughter, who has given her life over to the care of the aged colored woman of this vicinity.” Examiners found the rooms “comfortable and well-lighted,” the beds “clean and neat,” and toilets and baths “sanitary.”⁴³⁷

Fraternal and Sororal Organizations

After successfully petitioning the Grand Lodge of England on September 29, 1784, to organize a Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons, Prince Hall, Boston Smith, and Thomas Sanderson, African American residents of Boston, Massachusetts, established the first formally sanctioned Black Masonic Hall in the United States, Lodge No. 459. On March 2, 1797, Peter Mantore

wrote to Prince Hall asking permission for the African Lodge in Philadelphia to “constitute a lodge”:

Worshipful Sir and Brother,--We congratulate you for having been invested with the high and holy trust conferred upon you by the authorities in England, together with your success in obtaining the Warrant constituting African Lodge 459. . . . We have been tried by five Royal Arch Masons. The white Masons have refused to grant us a Dispensation, fearing that black men living in Virginia would get to be Masons too. We would rather be under you, and associated with our Brethren in Boston, than to be under those of the Pennsylvania Lodge; for if we are under you, we shall always be ready to assist in the furtherance of Masonry among us. . . . Please send the Dispensation by one of the Brethren of the Lodge, directing him to Rev. A. Jones, Minister of the African Church, who will extend to him the hospitalities of his home.⁴³⁸

Hall, on March 22, assured Mantore he had read his letter informing him, “that there are a number of blacks in your city who have received the light of masonry,” and replied his organization was “willing to set you at work under our charter and Lodge number 459 from London.” Subsequent to making this claim, Hall christened it the Philadelphia Masons the African Lodge proclaiming, “we hereby and herein give you a license to assemble and work as aforesaid under that denomination, as in the sight and fear of God.”⁴³⁹

Between 1797 and 1815, three more lodges in Philadelphia were granted charters by Prince Hall—Union, in 1810, Laurel, in 1811, and Phoenix, in 1814. On December 27, 1815, at Masonic Hall, 155 Lombard Street, these new lodges “met in convention” along with the African Lodge of Pennsylvania and “formed the First African Independent Grand Lodge with Absalom Jones as Grand Master,” with the “subordinate lodges surrendering their original warrants and being rechartered by the new Grand Lodge.”⁴⁴⁰

Five months after Absalom Jones's death in February 1818, the first signs of dissension ruffled the ranks of Philadelphia's African Lodge surfaced when an announcement appeared in *Poulson's American Daily Advertiser*. “At a meeting of the African Grand Lodge of North America held in the city of Philadelphia,” the notice read, “we did therein agree, by the unanimous voice of said Lodge, to expel the persons whose names are hereto affixed, for their bad conduct and misdemeanors, for the term of ninety-nine years, nine months, nine weeks, and nine days.” The Union Lodge of Philadelphia was expelled from the African Lodge of Philadelphia in January 1819, but its members reorganized a new lodge, the Hiram Grand Lodge, six months later, in July. These bodies did not meet again until 1848, when they assembled at the

Hall of the African Grand Lodge on South Eleventh Street to unite their lodges, eventually “merging under the title of the M. W. Grand Lodge of Ancient York Masons for the State of Pennsylvania on January, 19, 1848.”⁴⁴¹

While the St. Cyrpiran Lodge in Pittsburgh, founded in 1846 by Richard H. Gleaves as the first African American Masonic lodge “west of the Alleghenies,” was not affected by these changes to Pennsylvania’s Grand Masonic order, several of the Commonwealth’s earliest lodges were, including the Conestoga Lodge, Lancaster County, and “lodges in Lewisburg, Carlisle, Chambersburg, Holidaysburg, and Pottsville.” Once again, turmoil erupted and the Grand Lodge of Ancient York Masons for the State of Pennsylvania lasted only several years because “six lodges located in Philadelphia withdrew from the Grand Lodge” as did the Paxton Lodge in Lancaster County, and several lodges in adjacent Dauphin County. William H. Grimshaw confirmed the two groups both called themselves the M. W. Grand Lodge of the State of Pennsylvania but most people referred to each group as either “Eleventh Streeters” or “Seventh Streeters”—titles whose etymology dated to the original split in ideology by Philadelphia’s African Lodge and the Union Lodge.⁴⁴²



Photo from the 17th annual older boys conference at the Forster Street Colored YMCA, 1942. Photo from the Dauphin County Historical Society. Used with permission.

On December 26–27, 1882, the two lodges finally united for good at a convention held in Philadelphia at O’Neils Hall, 1338 Lombard Street, which fifty-three of the Commonwealth’s seventy-five African American lodges attended. Among the posts for the “District Deputy Grand Masters” were “First District: Chester County—P. M. W. G. M. Brother L. Berry, West Chester”; “Second District: Delaware County—R. W. Brother Johnson F. Purnsley, Chester”; “Third District:

Lancaster and Montgomery Counties—R. W. Brother Joseph M. Stafford, Marietta”; “Fourth District: Dauphin, York, Franklin and Cumberland Counties—R. W. Brother Samuel B. Bennett, Harrisburg”; “Fifth District: Bucks and Berks Counties, and Gilead, No. 63, Morning Star, No. 55, and North Star, no. 32—W. Brother Joseph W. S. Robinson, Philadelphia”; “Sixth District: Lycoming, Luzerne, Montour, Columbia, Northumberland, Lehigh, Susquehanna and Union Counties—Vacant”; “Seventh District: Blair, Center, Mifflin and Bradford Counties, Vacant”;

and the "Eighth District: Allegheny, Washington, Fayette, Green, Crawford, and Erie Counties—James H. Bond of Pittsburgh."⁴⁴³

African Americans in Pennsylvania were trailblazers in launching the fight to establish a "colored" branch of the Knights of Pythias. At a meeting of the Supreme Lodge of the Knights of Pythias in New York, on March 8, 1870, a petition was presented to the organization's leadership requesting "the degrees of the Order be conferred upon them." Among the men who made the appeal were Joshua Kelley, William Miller, Harry H. Gilbert, J. J. Shire, J. B. Stansbury, Harry W. Longfellow, and J. H. Furney. Although their petition was denied, a group of African American men formed the first independent Black Pythian group, the Colored Knights of Pythias, in Vicksburg, Mississippi, in 1880. Their constitution revealed they had been inspired by the actions of the Philadelphia contingent who, in 1870, proved that "color" was the only "base of objection to admission into white lodges." In their bylaws, the Pythians included a women's auxiliary, the Independent Order of Calanthe, which consisted of "Knights, their wives, mothers, daughters, sisters and relatives." Spreading from Mississippi throughout the southeastern United States, the Colored Knights of Pythians and their Court of Calanthe established lodges in Richmond, Virginia, and Washington, D.C., before they opened one in Philadelphia in 1885. Sir J. D. Kelly, one of the original petitioners of the white Pythians in New York City in 1870, "with the aid of J. J. Shire and H. H. Gilbert . . . succeeded in organizing the H. H. Garnett Lodge No. 1 (at 625 Pine Street) and the King Solomon Lodge No. 2 at Philadelphia." One of the organizers of the King Solomon Lodge, Joseph Solomon, was "a Hebrew, a businessman of Philadelphia" who, with the "Rev. Israel Derricks and Dr. E. A. Williams," founded the lodge.⁴⁴⁴

After being criticized by white Pythians represented by Howard Douglass, who wrote to the *Boston Herald* in 1887 arguing the African American Supreme Lodge had not been familiar with the proper rituals, Supreme Vice Chancellor Williams, of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, of the Colored Pythians immediately submitted a rebuttal to the *Boston Advocate*. He claimed

we are in full possession of the secret work is a well established fact throughout the South by all who have tested us and we are recognized as members of the brotherhood," and while "we learn that Dr. Douglass and his friends contemplate changing their ritualistic ceremonies and their secret work, we are glad to say that no change they can make will alter the fact that we are Pythians . . . in conformity with the ritual adopted by the Order.

In 1889, the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania had two lodges in Pittsburgh and western Pennsylvania, and by 1901, the number of lodges in the region reached fourteen. By 1903, Pennsylvania had split into two Grand Lodges, one located in the West and one in the East, but at

dual sessions in Philadelphia and Johnstown, they agreed in December 1903 to merge. In 1905, Pittsburgh was chosen by the Supreme Chancellor as the first Pennsylvania city to host the biennial session of the Supreme Lodges, with C. O. Hawkins and W. D. Garner representing the Commonwealth. During the following two years, lodges were added, including Smoky City No. 29 in Allegheny; Oakland No. 30 and Royal Grande No. 31 in Pittsburgh; Pythias No. 34 in Harrisburg; Westmoreland No. 27 in Greensburg; and Dunlap No. 9 in Brownsville.⁴⁴⁵

According to scholar David M. Fahey, the Pythians' "peak membership probably came in the early 1920s," but by the following decade, the organization experienced a downward turn in membership, which he believed was the case with "most black fraternal societies," adding "the Pythians lost membership during the Great Depression and World War II." Fahey claimed the Grand United Order of Odd Fellows possessed "the largest membership of any African American fraternal society in the late 19th and early 20th centuries." Like the Masons, Fahey contended, "the black Odd Fellows obtained their initial charter from a white fraternal society located in England."⁴⁴⁶

In 18th century England, the Odd Fellows split into two branches, as the Independent Order "broke away from the Grand United Order." The white American branch of Odd Fellows subsequently sided with the Independent Order of Odd Fellows in the early 19th century, and by the 1840s this organization "refused to charter black lodges." African Americans who wished to organize lodges turned to the other group in England, the Grand United Order of Odd Fellows, to receive their charters. These requests were granted by their British Brethren (and, by so doing, the African American Odd Fellows aligned themselves with what was the earliest manifestation of the group).⁴⁴⁷

While African American lodges were first organized in New York City, they quickly spread to Philadelphia. Unity Lodge No. 711 was established in Philadelphia on May 14, 1844, and the first branch of the female African American auxiliary of the G.U.O.O.F, the Household of Ruth, was founded in Harrisburg in 1857. By the late 19th century, W. E. B. Du Bois wrote, "the most powerful and flourishing secret order [in Pennsylvania and the United States] is that of the Odd Fellows, which has two hundred thousand members among American Negroes." Du Bois noted Philadelphia's nineteen lodges boasted a "total membership of 1188, and \$46,000 dollars worth of property," The lodges had names such as "Good Samaritan, Phoenix, Covenant, Friendship and Mt. Olive," and over the years they doled out relief to eight widows, and provided sick benefits to seventy-five members. Richard R. Wright Jr. wrote, that by 1906, the headquarters of the Grand United Order of Odd Fellows had moved to Philadelphia, where leaders "erected a six-story building, at a cost of \$125,000." Wright also noted the *Odd Fellows Journal* was published in Pennsylvania, and the number of lodges in the Commonwealth had grown to 105 by 1906.⁴⁴⁸

The last of the four largest African American fraternal societies was the Independent Benevolent and Protective Order of the Elks of the World (IBPOEW), founded in 1897 and organized in Cincinnati, Ohio, the following year by Arthur J. Riggs and Benjamin Franklin Howard. The Elks were known to have actively addressed the needs of working men and women (known as Daughter Elks) more comprehensively than any other group. According to Joel Shrock, the organization “offered leadership training, professional networking opportunities, social fellowship, and community service,” and fought “to eradicate African American illiteracy and challenged segregation.”⁴⁴⁹

The Elks began to make their way into African American communities in Pennsylvania by the second decade of the 20th century. Roland C. Barksdale-Hall wrote an article, “The Twin City Elks Lodge: A Unifying Force in Farrell’s African American Community” about the Mercer County lodge in which he described the Elks presence as “a major unifying force in the community.” Barksdale-Hall wrote that the lodge, organized in 1914, “was recognized for almost twenty years as the largest IBPOEW lodge in Pennsylvania.” Its presence was typical for communities that relied on the new technologies of the Industrial Revolution to attract African American migrants from the South. In Farrell, for instance, the American Sheet and Tin Plate Company, one of the businesses that relied on the fledgling steel industry, began employing African American laborers in the early 20th century.⁴⁵⁰

Coupled with growing business opportunities was the changing dynamic of the region’s black churches. Barksdale-Hall wrote, “between 1908 and 1944, African American newcomers to the Shenango Valley organized ten Baptist churches; three holiness churches; and a Catholic, a Colored Methodist Episcopal, and an African Methodist church.” Taking these factors into consideration, Farrell’s African American community was a microcosm of other communities around the

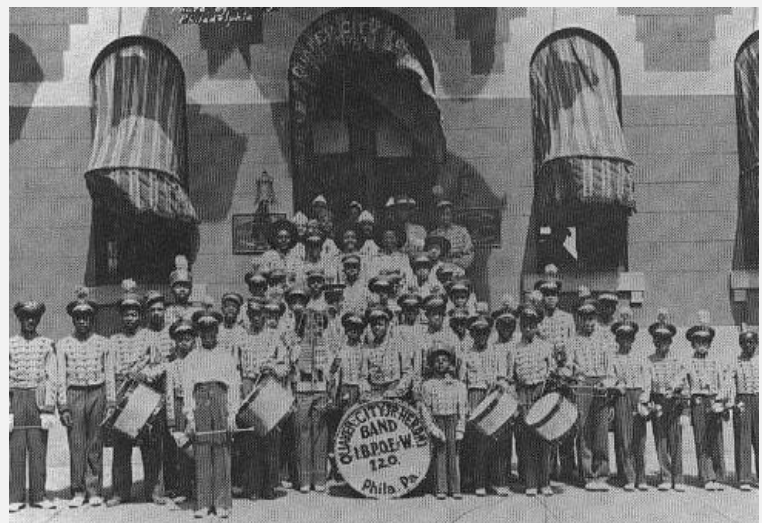


Photo of the Quaker City Young Elks, n.d. From the John W Mosley Collection, Courtesy Charles L. Blockson Afro American Collection, Temple University Libraries. Used with permission.

Commonwealth; by the 1920s there occurred a similar divide between men and women who chose distinct fraternal societies much as they did the ideologies of Marcus Garvey or the NAACP. Barksdale-Hall also believed that during “the prosperous 1920s, elitist fraternal groups also worked against African American unity by promoting classism.” He further argued that, as a

result of this dynamic, the Knights of Pythias Lodge was the “richest fraternal group” in Farrell, possessing “more money and more property than any of its competitors” yet it “lacked mass appeal” as their financial status may have attracted semi-skilled workers but “their exorbitant fees and exclusionary practices . . . worked against them.” Similar in nature, Barksdale-Hall contended, was the make-up in membership of the Prince Hall Masons. He believed its Calumet Lodge, founded in 1917, became “a stronghold of Farrell’s black intelligentsia; in 1920, its forty-one members reflected the middle class community,” including “four chefs, three clergymen, two barbers, two proprietors, two chauffeurs , two teamsters, a postal employee, a policeman, a mechanic, and a messenger.”⁴⁵¹

When the Twin City Elks Lodge organized in 1914, Barksdale-Hall insisted, “unlike other fraternal groups, the Elks accepted people into membership regardless of family background,” or “socioeconomic status,” factors that “contributed to its popularity among southern migrants throughout western Pennsylvania.” He believed the lodge supported many community events and activities for “young people,” such as “basketball, roller skating, a drum and bugle corps, majorettes, a marching band, and a youth council.” In addition, the Elks “sponsored a softball team for adults; arranged field trips to Pittsburgh and Cleveland; and held raffles, picnics, and cabarets.” The “Lodges’ club held floor shows that attracted such celebrities as Duke Ellington, Ray Charles, Peg Leg Bates, and Jesse Ownes.” By the 1920s, they fought for and often won seats on city council, prompting Barksdale-Hall to claim that “three out of four of [the] African Americans elected to major public offices in Farrell were Elks.”⁴⁵²

Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander came from a distinguished Philadelphia family of doctors, lawyers, civil rights activists, artists, and reverends, just to name a few occupations. For instance, Sadie Tanner Mossell’s maternal grandfather was the Bishop Benjamin Tucker Tanner “of the African Methodist Episcopal Church” who “founded the *AME Church Review*.” In addition, her father Aaron and his brother Nathan “were the first black graduates of the University of Pennsylvania’s law and medical schools, respectively,” and her maternal uncle, Henry Ossawa Tanner, was a world renowned artist, painter and sculptor. Sadie attended the University of Pennsylvania, where she received her Bachelor’s degree in education in 1918 and her PhD. in economics in 1921. She then went on to marry the Harvard Law School graduate Raymond Pace Alexander in 1923. She graduated from the University of Pennsylvania Law school in 1927. Both Sadie and Raymond “helped draft the 1935 state civil rights act,” which according to Mack, “helped strengthen the nondiscrimination provisions of the state public accommodation laws” (which were just discussed a few pages back). Sadie was appointed by Harry Truman to serve on the President’s Committee on Civil Rights in 1946, and, during the early 1950’s, Alexander was “selected as a member of the newly formed Philadelphia Commission on Human Relations.”⁴⁵³

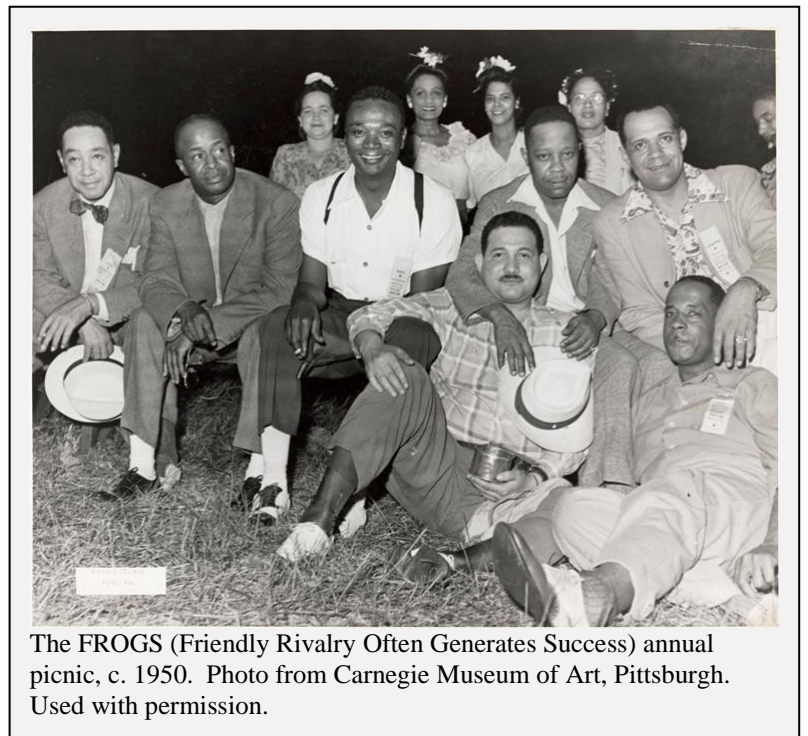
Coatesville: A Case Study in the Evolution of Fraternal and Sororal Societies

In order to trace the historical development of fraternal and sororal societies from the late 19th through the mid-20th century, historians shift focus to one city in particular, Coatesville, which had witnessed the birth and evolution of each group in the community. On September 13, 1886, West Chester's *Daily Local News* reported on the completion of the Coatesville Masonic Hall that several men's and women's societies occupied:

The new hall of Lily of the Valley Lodge of Colored Masons of Coatesville was dedicated on Saturday afternoon last. . . . W. S. Underwood, M. W. G. M. of Pennsylvania, made an address, after which the corner-stone, containing names and members of the committee, was laid into position. The building is on Coates street, near Sixth-avenue, and is completed. . . . It is 28x32 feet and three stories high. The lodge meets in the third story, the Odd Fellows and, and a society of colored women known as 'Mary's Tent' on the second floor, while the ground floor will be used for meetings, entertainments, etc.⁴⁵⁴

In 1889, immediately following a service at the Union AME Church in Coatesville, attended by thirty members of the Lily of the Valley Lodge and "six members of the order from Downingtown and four from West Chester," the masons and their visitors had "a setout in their lodge room" that was "heartily enjoyed by all." In 1923, West Chester's *Daily Local News* reported that the Lily of the Valley Lodge held "its forty-eighth anniversary" in Philadelphia's "Masonic auditorium on Seventh and Lombard Streets." A brief parade was held prior to the services. The Eagle Band was

joined by St. John's Commandery in a march through the neighborhood, which passed by the Reverend John R. Logan preaching "a powerful sermon." The "business of the anniversary" was



“attended by several hundred members of the fraternity from Coatesville, Wilmington, Philadelphia, Lancaster, West Chester and Reading.”⁴⁵⁵

A tragedy in 1925 affected the Commonwealth's Masonic fraternity when, on September 3, William G. Butler, Grand Master of the Lily of the Valley Lodge in Coatesville and the Grand Master of Pennsylvania's Grand Lodge, died in an automobile accident along the Lincoln Highway. The *Pittsburgh Courier* reported, “Mr. Butler had been to Oxford on official business connected with his Masonic office and had missed the last trolley home,” forcing him to ask for a ride home instead. The newspaper described Butler as an individual who was “long prominent in state and national Masonic affairs,” and that “men prominent in Masonic circles of the state” had been “in attendance at the funeral services,” adding “thousands of white and colored citizens of the section lined the streets to pay him the last respects.”⁴⁵⁶

In an announcement of the death of W. H. Branch., who died of natural causes, the January 28, 1933, edition of the *Pittsburgh Courier* noted he was “the only colored undertaker in Coatesville” and “an active Mason and the district deputy for the third Masonic district.” The newspaper account reported that as a Mason, Branch was actively involved in every “civic, religious, welfare and fraternal endeavor in Coatesville.”⁴⁵⁷



The Cotillion Quadrille, Philadelphia Cotillion Society, 1950s. From the John W Mosley Collection, Courtesy Charles L. Blockson Afro American Collection, Temple University Libraries. Used with permission.

The female auxiliary of the Masons, the Order of the Easter Star, held a statewide meeting in Coatesville on August 2, 1941, hosted by the Deborah Grand Chapter of Coatesville. At the meeting, the women noted their organization enjoyed a “successful year” in which “more than 50 chapters were reported.” Among the women elected as officers for the ensuing year were “Grand Worthy Matron, Anna R. B. Washington, Williamsport; Associate Grand Matron, M. Susie Hill, Philadelphia; Grand Treasurer, Margaret Brown, Charleroi; Grand Conductress,

Mary L. Sedgwick, Johnstown; and “Grand Trustees, Farlena Nichols, Pittsburgh, and Gertrude Wellman, Beaver.”⁴⁵⁸

In 1886, an article appearing in the West Chester *Daily Local News* announced the founding of the Odd Fellows in the community: "Several of the members of the colored lodge of Kennett Square, No. 2415 visited Coatesville on Saturday and organized a lodge at that place. The officers were initiated in the afternoon and in the evening the others were initiated in the third story of Market Hall. . . . The new organization is to be known as the Sober Retreat Lodge No. 2756." Two years later, it was duly reported by the *Chester Valley Union* that the Sober Retreat Lodge, G.U.O.O.F. would "celebrate its second anniversary by cake-walk in Market Hall" in which lodges "from Kennett Square and other places, headed by the Eagle Coronet Band, will participate in a parade from Seventh avenue to the Hall in the evening." Also in 1888, the women's auxiliary of the Sober Retreat Lodge, the Household of Ruth, organized Lodge No. 514. By May 1893, the number "considerably increased" from the "20 charter members." The Household of Ruth as of 1901 met "the Third Thursday of each month at Masonic Hall, Coates street."⁴⁵⁹

Coatesville also had a branch of the Knights of Pythias, the Charles Sumner Lodge No. 15, established in 1890 by W. P. Martin, P. C. B. Henson, and Edward Smith, among others, which met at the "Masonic Hall on Sixth and Coates." Attached to this group was the female Court of Calanthe No.8. After celebrating its seventh anniversary in 1897 with a cake walk and the music of the Parkesburg Band, "the Eureka Court of Calanthe presented a fine cake to the lodge," and "altogether the affair was a most enjoyable one." In 1907, an article in the West Chester *Daily Local News* covered the festivities surrounding the anniversary of the Knights of Pythias: "Fifty members of Charles Sumner Lodge, No. 18, Knights of Pythias, celebrated their seventeenth anniversary, in the Opera House, Saturday night, in a very appropriate manner. . . . Wright's band of Wilmington Del. was here, and after a walk around the streets the lodgemen assembled in the hall. . . . The feature of the occasion was promenading."⁴⁶⁰

While these groups waned by the 1930s, the Elks had grown active in Coatesville by the mid-20th century. On January 19, 1935, the *Coatesville Record* reported, "The Mount Vernon Lodge of Elks of this city held its annual installation of officers on Monday last at the lodge rooms. At the same time, plans for the year's work of the organization were mapped out." Among the officers installed were esteemed leading knight, J. Bradford Jr.; esteemed loyal knight, J. Wilson Jr.; medical examiner, Dr. W. C. Atkinson; and trustees, William Henson, T. Bland, M. Benner, William Diggs, and E. Williams. The mission of Coatesville's Mount Vernon Elks was made clear by descriptions of the lodge's involvement in a number of social activities recorded by the local press. On May 7, 1951, for instance, it was noted that the Elks held a "district oratorical contest" in which "Miss Jean Anderson, a daughter of Prof. and Mrs. Thomas J. Anderson, was the first place winner." Held at the Union AME Church, "speakers from all over Eastern Pennsylvania, including Norristown, Philadelphia, and Reading participated." The article mentioned that the first and second place winners would travel to "Lancaster on May 10 to participate in the state contest which will be held at the state convention of I.B.P. Order of Elks

which will take place in that city.” The article noted that Anderson, who spoke on “The Constitution,” was sponsored by the Mount Vernon Lodge and William. H. Jones, a teacher at the James Adams School.⁴⁶¹

Pennsylvania State Federation of Negro Women's Clubs

Established in 1903 as a statewide coalition of the many disparate African American women's club groups in the Commonwealth, particularly after the founding of the National Association of Colored Women in 1896 by Mary Church Terrell, Anna Jane Patterson, and Anna Julia Cooper, the Pennsylvania State Federation of Negro Women's Clubs fought for African American women's rights, as well as for black civil rights in general, during much of the 20th century. In August 1923, the organization published a brief summary of its seventeen year history. “The Pennsylvania Federation of Negro Women's Club's organized 1903, at Pittsburgh, Pa. Federated with the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs 1904. Mesdames Rebecca Aldridge Sadie Black Hamilton, Blanche Dillard, Lillian Shorter, Georgia Payne, and Laura Brown were among the leading pioneer workers. Mrs. Rebecca Aldridge served as president for 13 years, and under her administration a property was purchased at New Castle, Pa which for several years served as a home for children. [The] Pennsylvania Federation has 102 federated clubs, two city federations, viz.: Philadelphia and Pittsburgh with about 40 clubs each, 26 departments all numbering about 13,000 women in this, every phase of community life is looked after by a competent leader.”⁴⁶²

The federation's history noted that local clubs had purchased two properties to initiate and host community activities. A community center for girls, purchased by the Emergency Cub of York and founded by Ida Grayson, was intended to give them “an opportunity to work out their

problems along many lines.” A home for young women, valued at \$414,000, was purchased and established by the Ruth L. Bennett Improvement Club, Chester, to provide care for women who “come to Chester in quest of employment.” The home assisted “over 500 girls” that “have found shelter during the past eight months.”⁴⁶³



Phi Delta Kappa, Xi Chapter (Black Teachers' Sorority), n.d. Photo from the Chester County Historical Society. Used with permission.

The federation's conventions, held annually during much of the 20th century, attest to the organization's work for social

services, welfare, women's issues, and civil and political rights, In August 1911, for instance, when the women met for their eighth conference in New Brighton, Beaver County, they vehemently condemned the recent lynching of Zachariah Walker in Coatesville, which they formalized with a resolution:

Whereas, the spirit of lawlessness and mob rule which for years has marked the attitude of the white race towards the colored races, especially the Negroes. . . .

"Whereas . . . a mob of the so-called best citizens of Coatesville, Pa. a town near the city of Brotherly Love did take and burn alive a human being of the Negro race. . . .

"Therefore be it resolved that the State Federation of Negro Women's clubs now assembled in Wayman AME in New Brighton, Pa., express our horror for the lack of regard for law, life and liberty of an American citizen. . . . Resolved that a copy of these resolutions be sent to the Governor of Pennsylvania imploring him to insist upon the arrest and punishment of all the guilty persons.⁴⁶⁴

Twelve years later, the *Pittsburgh Courier* provided a thorough description of the twenty-first conference held in York. "The annual meeting of the Pennsylvania State Federation closed one of the most harmonious and beneficial sessions in its history," the newspaper reported, "Friday evening in the beautiful AME Zion Church of York, Pennsylvania. The delegates numbered 134, with officers and department heads swelling the voting strength to 180." A speech by Pennsylvania's First Lady Cornelia Bryce Pinchot was followed by "musical selections from Carl Diton and Miss Viola Hill, and "eloquent addresses" by such women as Daisy E. Lampkin, of Pittsburgh, Mazie Griffin of Philadelphia, Julia Craig of York, Maude Coleman of Harrisburg, and Hattie P. Smith of Wilkes-Barre.⁴⁶⁵

At the Federation's thirty-first annual convention in Homestead, Allegheny County, in August 1934, the majority of the group met at Clark Memorial Baptist Church at Thirteenth and Glen streets, and "the junior sessions took place at the Park Place AME Church." The principal speaker was none other than Daisy E. Lampkin, NAACP regional field secretary of the NAACP and vice president of the National Association of Colored Women. Forrester B. Washington, director of the Atlanta School of Social Work, also spoke, and he chose the relevant Great Depression-influenced topic, "Negro on Relief."⁴⁶⁶

The club's July 1938 convention in Williamsport was covered by the *Chicago Defender*, which ran an article entitled "Pennsylvania Club Women Close 35th Annual Meet." The newspaper reported that "Mrs. Adelaide Harty Fleming, R.N. superintendent of the Convalescent Hospital for Colored Women" was "unanimously renamed for the second year as the head of the

organization.” The article applauded the City of Williamsport for being “a cordial host” and mentioned that most of the activities celebrated the life of Ruth Bennett, who had been federation president for “nearly 20 years.” After noting that a long article was on Bennett was published by the *Williamsport Sun*, touting her “founding of the Ruth Bennett Community Center and Nursery in Chester,” and being “awarded the Kiwanis International Service Medal for her outstanding civic activities,” the election of district and state officers took place. “Miss Bertha Johnson of Duquesne was elevated from the vice presidency of the junior federation to the office of president.”⁴⁶⁷

World War II had an impact on discussions at the 38th convention held for three days at Cheyney University, in 1941. As Mrs. Adelaide Harty Fleming was again reelected for the fifth year running, it was noted that “a large part of the three-day convention” was “given to a discussion of ‘Negro Women and Defense.’” The primary speakers were Leslie Pinckney Hill, president of Cheyney, and Maude Coleman, a “state interracial consultant.” Elected to the executive branch of the agency were: Mrs. Elam Veney, Homestead, vice president; Mrs. Susan J. Blosckson, Sewickley, recording secretary; Mrs. Anna Corbin, West Chester, organizer; and Mrs. Annie E. Morton, Pittsburgh, treasurer.⁴⁶⁸

Notes

⁴²⁸ Nash, *Forging Freedom*, 123; J.H. Powell, *Bring out your dead : the great plague of yellow fever in Philadelphia in 1793*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993, 97-102.

⁴²⁹ Nash, *Forging Freedom*, 124; Mathew Carey, *A Short Account of the Malignant Fever*, 4th edition, Philadelphia: Printed by the Author, 63-65; Absalom Jones, *A Narrative of the Proceedings of the Black People During the Late Awful Calamity in Philadelphia in the year 1793, And a Refutation of some Censures, Thrown upon Them in Some Late Publications*. (Philadelphia: Printed for the authors, by William W. Woodward, 1794).

⁴³⁰ *Hazard's Register*, March 12, 1831, VII, 163-164; see also Aptheker, *Documentary History*, 111-114.

⁴³¹ Ibid.

⁴³² Ibid.

⁴³³ Julie Winch, *The Elite of Our People: Joseph Wilson's Sketches of Black Upper Class Life in Antebellum Philadelphia*, University Park: Penn State Press, 2000, 5; 80-86.

⁴³⁴ *Christian Recorder*, August 19, 1865; January 14th, 1865.

⁴³⁵ Pennsylvania Board of Public Charities, *Forty-Third Annual Report of the Board of Commissioners of Public Charities for the State of Pennsylvania*, Vol. 3, Office of the Board, Harrisburg, 1912, 85.

⁴³⁶ *Pennsylvania Negro Business Directory*, 127.

⁴³⁷ Pennsylvania Board of Public Charities, *Forty-Fifth Annual Report of the Board of Commissioners of Public Charities for the State of Pennsylvania*, Office of the Board,, Harrisburg, 1914, 56.

⁴³⁸ Prince Hall Masons of Philadelphia. *A History of The Most Worshipful Prince Hall Grand Lodge, Free and Accepted Masons, of Pennsylvania*. 2003, 74; Harry E. Davis' 1946 *Freemasonry Among Negroes* Ohio: Published Under Auspices of The United Supreme Council, Ancient & Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry,

Northern Jurisdiction, 1946, 73. See also Harold Von Buren Voorhis' *Negro Masonry in the United States*, New York: H. Emerson, 1940.

⁴³⁹ *Most Worshipful Prince Hall*, 75; *Freemasonry*, 75.

⁴⁴⁰ *Most Worshipful Prince Hall*, 75; *Freemasonry*, 94; see also William H. Grimshaw, *Official History of Freemasonry Among the Colored People in North America*, New York: McCoy Publishing and Masonic Supply, 1903, 113.

⁴⁴¹ *Poulson's American Daily Advertiser* July 8th, 1818; Grimshaw, *Official History*, 113-114; *MWPH*, 78.

⁴⁴² *MWPH*, 78; Grimshaw, *Official History*, 114, 115.

⁴⁴³ *MWPH*, 79-82.

⁴⁴⁴ Ephie Augustus Williams, Wendell Green Smith, and Joseph Lawrence Jones, *History and Manual of the Colored Knights of Pythias*, Nashville: National Baptist Publication Board, 1917, 13, 16, 60, 72, 587.

⁴⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 77, 249.

⁴⁴⁶ Fahey in Mjagkij, *Organizing Black America*, 169.

⁴⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴⁸ Wright, *The Negro in Pennsylvania*, 122; Fahey in Mjagkij, *Organizing Black America*, 252; Du Bois *Philadelphia Negro*, 222, 233.

⁴⁴⁹ Joel Shrock in Mjagkij, 2 *Organizing Black America*, 67.

⁴⁵⁰ Roland C. Barksdale-Hall, "The Twin City Elks Lodge, A Unifying Force in Farrell's African-American Community," in *Pennsylvania Folklife*, Autumn, 1994, 17.

⁴⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 20-22.

⁴⁵² *Ibid.*, 22-23.

⁴⁵³ Kenneth W. Mack, "A Social History of Everyday Practice: Sadie T.M. Alexander and the Incorporation of Black Women into the American legal Profession, 1925-1960," *Cornell Law Review*, 87, no. 1405, 2002; Kenneth Walter Mack in Susan Ware and Stacy Lorraine Braukman's *Notable American Women: A Biographical Dictionary Completing the 20th Century*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005, 18-19; J. Clay Smith Jr., ed., *Rebels in Law: Voices in History of Black Women Lawyers*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000, 26-29; Beverly Guy Sheftal, ed., *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*, New Press, 1995, 95-100; Clarendia M. Phillips, *African-American Fraternities and Sororities: The Legacy and the Vision*, Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2005 127-135; Lawrence C. Ross, Jr. *The Divine Nine: The History of African-American Fraternities and Sorties*, 373; University of Pennsylvania Archives, Alexander Papers--Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander Records, UPT 50 A374S and Raymond Pace Alexander Records, UPT 50 A 374R. Our informants in Coatesville told us many stories about the Turner's "summer house" away from Philadelphia, and the records at Penn, including pictures, corroborate these statements.

⁴⁵⁴ *West Chester Daily Local News*, 9-13-1886.

⁴⁵⁵ *West Chester Daily Local News*, 7-1-1889; *West Chester Daily Local News*, 9-17-1923.

⁴⁵⁶ *Pittsburgh Courier*, 9-5-1925.

⁴⁵⁷ *Pittsburgh Courier*, 1-28-1933.

⁴⁵⁸ *Pittsburgh Courier*, 8-2-1941.

⁴⁵⁹ *West Chester Daily Local News*, 5-10-1886; *Chester Valley Union*, 6-20-1888.; *Coatesville Weekly Times*, 5-6-1893; *Chester Valley Union*, 3-6-1901.

⁴⁶⁰ *Coatesville Weekly Times*, 5-6-1893; *Chester Valley Union*, 3-6-1901; *Coatesville Weekly Times* 5-6-1893; *Morning Republican*, 4-6-1897; *West Chester Daily Local News*, 10-14-1907.

⁴⁶¹ *Coatesville Record*, 1-19-1935; *Coatesville Record*, 5-7-1951.

⁴⁶² Beverly W. Jones, "Mary Church Terrell and the National Association of Colored Women, 1896 to 1901," *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 67, no. 1, pp. 20-33; *Pittsburgh Courier*, August 4, 1923.

⁴⁶³ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁴ *Pittsburgh Courier*, 4-26-1911.

⁴⁶⁵ *Pittsburgh Courier*, 8-9-1924.

⁴⁶⁶ *Pittsburgh Courier*, 8-11-1934.

⁴⁶⁷ *Chicago Defender*, 7-23-1938.

⁴⁶⁸ *Chicago Defender*, 6-26-1941.

Chapter 7

The Arts, Popular Culture and Sports, 1644-1965

Scholar Todd Boyd argues convincingly that “it is in the broad area of popular culture that African Americans have had their greatest and most profound effects on American society.”

⁴⁶⁹ Despite the constraints of stereotyping and segregation, it was in the arts, sports, and popular entertainment that African Americans were most successful in creating self-defined public imagery that captured mainstream attention through the modern mass media. In the areas of music and sports most particularly, athletes and artists pushed the boundaries limiting black advancement and set standards of performance that ultimately informed all of American popular culture.

Because of the dearth of documentation about African American popular culture in Pennsylvania during the 18th century, it is necessary to utilize an array of sources to piece together the vibrant cultural history of individuals of African descent. The slave culture is evidenced by the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, which mentions fiddlers, dancers, musicians, and the like. The advertisements for runaway slaves yields much more information than about their flight to freedom. For example, On June 6, 1744 an advertisement in the *Gazette* noted, “RUN away, from Bryan Murry, of Reading Furnace, Collier, a Negro Man, named Isaac, aged about 26 Years . . . talks good English, and plays on the Fiddle.” Five years later, on November 2, 1749, another similar notice was placed, yet this time the fugitive slave possessed other talents: “Run away three weeks ago, from Marcus Kuhl, of Philadelphia, baker, a Negro man, named



Jake Parkes playing the banjo, 1910. From LancasterHistory.org. Used with permission.

Scipio, wears a blue broad cloth coat, or a black ditto, old shoes, and stockings, of a short stature, plays on the banjo, and sings with it. . . . Whoever takes up and secures said slave, so that his master may have him again, shall have Fifteen Shillings reward, and reasonable charges, paid by MARCUS KUHL.” Other advertisements throughout the latter half of the 18th century contained similar descriptions, such as one for a 24 year old “negro man named Dan,” who ran away from his owner in Lancaster, and was “fond of playing the fiddle,” or the case of a “negro slave named Ishmael,” who “plays well on the fiddle.”⁴⁷⁰ In fact, Edward Raymond Turner has asserted that some of these individuals would even make “considerable money by playing” such instruments whether one was a slave, an indentured servant, or a free African American musician living in Pennsylvania during the mid to late 18th century.⁴⁷¹

There exist, however, other founts of information for scholars or laypeople wishing to reconstruct the early socio-cultural life of Pennsylvania’s slave, indentured and free black communities. And among these works, we see a discussion of the great variety of musical events, fairs, galas and celebrations which took place during the late 18th to the mi-19th centuries and of which African Americans in Pennsylvania participated. John Fanning Watson, for instance, in his 1830 *Annals of Philadelphia, and Pennsylvania, in the Olden Time*, wrote, “it was the custom for the slave blacks at the time of fairs and other great holidays, to go there (there being “Potter’s Field” or the “Strangers and Negro Burial Grounds” located on the site of what is now called Washington Square) to the number of one thousand, of both sexes, and hold their dances, dancing after the manner of their several nations in Africa, and speaking and singing in their native dialects.”⁴⁷² In this specific case, Watson as well as Edward Raymond Turner were most likely referring to the holiday of “Pinkster,” in which both Northern African American free and slave communities in New Jersey, New York and Pennsylvania would celebrate the Pentacost several months after Easter. Most likely appropriated from the Dutch pentacost celebrations of those who settled in the Hudson, Delaware and Schuylkill Valley regions in particluar, the holiday was appropriated by African Americans by the late 18th century and of whom also added African cultural traditions to the mix.

⁴⁷³ In addition, Gary B. Nash has found, when examining the Pennsylvania Society for the Abolition of Slavery’s papers, that the organization had “as early as 1796” warned Philadelphia African Americans “against boisterous gatherings where dancing and frolicking” occurred.⁴⁷⁴

Balls, galas, celebrations and parades were commonplace by the turn of the 19th century, and African Americans in Philadelphia either held their own events or participated as entertainers

at the events of the white aristocracy. In an example of the former, the noted diarist Elizabeth Drinker has commented upon what was perhaps the first African American Masonic parade in the city in 1797 and the accompanying music and revelry. Hence, she asserted when watching this procession, led by Absalom Jones, incidentally, “Tis the first I heard of negro Masons—a late thing, I guess.”⁴⁷⁵ Drinker would also comment upon her “servants” social lives in 1799, stating that “Jacob Turner and Sally Needham, our negro and negress, went to a wedding this evening.

Jacob dressed in a light cloth coat, white cassimere vest and breeches, white silk stockings and a new hat. Sarah, ye brides-maid, in white muslin, dizzened off with white ribbons from head to foot, yellow morocco shoes, with white bows....’Tis now near 11 o’clock, and they are not yet returned.”⁴⁷⁶



The Cotillion Quadrille, 1950s. From the John W Mosley Collection, Courtesy Charles L. Blockson Afro American Collection, Temple University Archives. Used with permission.

Yet regardless of where, how or when African American free, indentured, or slave individuals and/or groups would take part in entertainments during the late 18th through the mid-19th century, there is one thing that we know for certain: several prominent black entertainers from the state became not only locally and nationally famous, but also internationally acclaimed as well. The first and perhaps most notable of these was Francis Johnson, who as the scholar Charles Kelley Jones has asserted, became “America’s most prominent musician and composer during the Federal Period.”⁴⁷⁷ Jones has discussed that Johnson’s penchant for organizing and composing brass band music came out of the national craze for such concerts following the war of 1812 and that the musician “immersed himself in the sacred and secular music that surrounded him in this vibrant city.” This is a fact made all the more amazing considering that Johnson would have no doubt been influenced by the music of the inchoate independent black church and individuals such as Richard Allen, who even himself had edited and published a hymnal in 1801, entitled *A Collection of Spiritual Songs and Hymns Selected from Various Authors*, and later in 1818 would put forth his first official hymnal of the A.M.E. Church entitled *The African Methodist Pocket Hymn Book*.⁴⁷⁸

Johnson’s fusion of Western, African, and African American musical influences caught the attention of the noteworthy ethnomusicologist Eilenen Southern, who identifies Johnson “a prolific composer and arranger” of “more than two hundred compositions including

cotillions, quadrilles, quick-steps and other marches, stylized dances, sentimental ballads, patriotic songs, arrangements of operatic airs, and even Ethiopian minstrel songs.”⁴⁷⁹ In addition, Gary B. Nash notes that “Johnson by 1819 was in demand wherever white Philadelphia aristocracy gathered for social events,” and “celebrated as a keyed-bugle, trumpet and violin player,” was a “leader of the band at all balls, public and private.” Johnson not only went on to organize a series of famous concerts for individuals such as the Revolutionary war hero, General Lafayette when he revisited the city in 1824, but also travelled abroad playing in England for Queen Victoria’s coronation in 1837. Eileen Southern argues that Johnson did all of this in spite of discrimination, as he had “competed successfully with white musical organizations for public patronage against...overwhelming odds.” Furthermore, the ethnomusicologist Scott Barnhart even refers to Johnson as one of the progenitors of Jazz music a century before its synthesis, stating that with compositions such as “Princeton Gallopade,” “The New Bird Waltz,” “Dirge,” “Philadelphia’s Firemen’s Cotillion,” and “General Lafayette’s Trumpet March and Quickstep” the musician’s technique predated the eventual rise of the “jazz trumpet” as the “core” of the modern “African American [jazz] experience.” Thus, Barnhart states, Johnson, along with his all-African American Chestnut Brass Quintet, composed music that “contains those same syncopated rhythms that were crucial to the development of Ragtime.”

Johnson’s impact on shaping both American and African American music was so profound, that even a school of music known as “The Philadelphia School” grew out of his acclaim, as he and his compatriots taught and trained both the current and next generation of the city, region, and nation’s African American popular musicians, such as Aaron J.R. Connor and William Appo.⁴⁸⁰



Sammy Davis Jr., c. 1950. From the John W Mosley Collection, Courtesy Charles L. Blockson Afro American Collection, Temple University Archives. Used with permission.

By the mid- to late 19th century, many African American brass bands played at various events around the state, whether sponsored by churches, fraternal and sororal societies, or simply were just gatherings celebrate special memorials. For instance, in Coatesville, Chester County, on August 1, 1883, it was reported that a “grand jubilee and concert was given under the auspices of the ‘Lily of the Valley’ Lodge, No. 59, Colored F.A.M. of this place” during which an “Emancipation Proclamation Celebration” was

undertaken. The Oxford Band and the Goodwill Band from Lancaster “discoursed some fine music” at the event. Following a parade through “the principal streets in the afternoon,” participants headed to “Harlan Grove, where they were addressed by John Groff of West Chester.” The evening culminated with a cakewalk.⁴⁸¹ Another brass band known as the “Eagle Cornet Band,” was reported upon a great deal in the late nineteenth century Chester County press. For instance, in November of 1887, The West Chester *Daily Local News* reported that “The Eagle Cornet Band is the name of a new organization of Coatesville, composed of young colored men of that place. They have a good set of German silver instruments, and their number is eighteen.”⁴⁸² In December of that year, they are reported to have given a well-attended and “flourishing” concert at the city’s African American Masonic Hall, and in the spring, the paper began a series on the band’s attempt to “furnish themselves with new uniforms” and “to this end have just sent out one hundred and fifty envelopes” requesting that they be returned to them with “\$2 in each.”⁴⁸³ During the Benjamin Harrison Republican Presidency Campaign, we see the band appear at an African American political gathering supporting the ticket, as the newspaper stated that “A Harrison and Reid pole was raised at the residence of John Scott, in Valley Township on Saturday last. The Eagle Cornet Band, of Coateville, was present and furnished music for the occasion.”⁴⁸⁴

Another significant early to mid-19th century musician from Pennsylvania who also reached the heights of acclaim was Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield, nicknamed “The Black Swan.” According to Charles Blockson, Greenfield “toured the United States, Canada, and Europe, capping her travels with a performance before Queen Victoria in 1854.”⁴⁸⁵ In the early part of her European tour, *Frederick Douglass’ Paper* published this piece discussing her travels:

WE are just informed by letter from England, that Miss Elizabeth Greenfield (alias “the Black Swan”) has been singing at the Stafford House, before a grand party of distinguished guests of the Duchess of Sutherland. With her usual true benevolence and kind-heartedness, her Grace, the Duchess, gave a concert for the express purpose of bringing Miss Greenfield forward. The accompaniments were played for Miss G. on the occasion by Sir *George Smart*. There seems to us to be nothing strange about this. English people and their aristocracy know nothing of *colorphobia*, which is, peculiarly, the disease of the United States. - The Duchess of Sutherland, doubtless, recognizes in Miss Greenfield rare musical genius.⁴⁸⁶

After Greenfield returned home, she toured around the northeast and midwest until settling back in Philadelphia where she opened a voice studio. Once again, *Frederick Douglass' Paper* commented upon her singing stating “We would urge our colored friends to go and hear the Black Swan: apart from the rich musical treat they will have an opportunity of looking into their own hearts, and seeing what they did not, perhaps, suspect before the first few utterances in her part will cover them with surprise, and joy and triumph. They will hear, in spite of the convictions they have been educated into in this caste cursed land, they will hear what supernal good may come out of our own Nazareth.”⁴⁸⁷ Before Greenfield’s died in 1876, she sang in taught and led the choir at the African American Shiloh Baptist Church in on 20th and Catherine Streets, and according to Roger Lane, her “efforts helped make Shiloh a major musical center, and when just the year after her death in 1876 the stately Academy of Music agreed for the first time to open its stage to an all-black performance, the pioneers were youngsters from the church’s Sabbath school.”⁴⁸⁸

By the turn of the 20th century, the African American church as a place to hear music paralleled the rise of African American gospel music—often credited to the “father of Gospel music” Charles Albert Tindley. Tindley came to Philadelphia in 1902 and became the pastor of the Bainbridge Street Methodist Church (eventually renamed Tindley Temple). It was here that he flourished as a composer of gospel music and attracted mass crowds and parishioners to the church’s famed concerts. The ethnomusicologist Robert Darden notes that “most of his songs were placed in the pentatonic scale and allowed ample room for rhythmic, melodic and even lyrical improvisations.”⁴⁸⁹ Tindley’s *New Songs of the Gospel*, published in 1901 is considered the seminal work in the composition of original African American gospel music history, having among its pieces “I’ll Overcome Someday” which would be rearranged later into the 1960’s Civil Rights anthem “We Shall Overcome.” Ethnomusicologist Samuel Floyd has further stated of Tindley that “The hymns written by Tindley carried a camp-meeting intensity and fervor that would inspire the later crystallization and development of black gospel style” in which he “created space in his songs to accommodate the call and response figures and improvisations.”⁴⁹⁰

John T. Gibson’s New Standard and New Dunbar Theaters

In terms of the rise of secular African American popular entertainments during the 20th century, we can see that many African American “legitimate” and “vaudeville” theater houses (and later simply theaters, taverns or inns) began to appear in Pennsylvania soon after

the century began. One particularly interesting story is that of John T. Gibson, who in June of 1937 died and was eulogized in the *Philadelphia Tribune* in this manner:

John T. Gibson is dead. His death ends one of the most unusual careers in Philadelphia. From a meat peddler he arose to a theater magnate worth easily three-quarters of a million dollars. With the depression he lost the most valuable of his holdings. His last years were spent in semi-seclusion.⁴⁹¹

Born in Baltimore in 1878, Gibson moved to Philadelphia after graduating from Morgan College Preparatory School. In the city, he undertook a variety of jobs from meat-peddling to furniture upholstery, and by 1910 had saved up enough money to become a part-owner of a small motion picture and vaudeville house on South Street known as the North Pole. This was, however, only the beginning of Gibson's foray into the growing-popular amusements industry, as by January of 1914, Gibson would purchase the Standard Theater, a large 1500 seat performance venue located on the 1200 block of South Street. In so doing, Gibson turned a formerly white-owned and operated theater known for discriminating against its black clientele into a thriving African American theater located in the heart of Philadelphia's black community.

When observing the demographic make up of Philadelphia's African American community as of 1910, census records show that most of Philadelphia's approximately 85,000 African Americans were concentrated in the nine Philadelphia wards which lay south of Spruce Street and east of the Schuylkill River (not too dissimilar from Du Bois' 1899 analysis in the *Philadelphia Negro*).⁴⁹² Unfortunately, however, all was not well in how African Americans were treated when frequenting the very establishments that were so close to their homes. Discrimination was rampant, and theater discrimination in particular was just one of the many ongoing problems that Jim Crow had caused for northern blacks in states like Pennsylvania and cities such as Philadelphia throughout much of the 20th century. In one particular incident which had occurred at the Standard Theater only several months prior to Gibson's purchase of the building, the *Philadelphia Tribune* reported that a man named Walter Flounoy of 1832 Addision Street had purchased tickets to a show only to be relegated to the balcony of the theater. The *Tribune* had stated that Flounoy was the first customer in line when the Standard's box-office had opened at 7:00 A.M. on October 10, 1913, and as such he believed that he was entitled to select among the best seats in the house. Flounoy complained, but to no avail, and the *Tribune* thus labeled the Standard as a place African

Americans should avoid, commenting that “All colored people should stay away from the Standard Theater.”⁴⁹³

The Standard Theater was by no means the only theater in Philadelphia that discriminated against African Americans. Regardless of whether these white-owned and operated theaters exhibited films, vaudeville or minstrel acts, “legitimate” drama or musical comedy, African American patrons were either flatly denied admission or simply relegated to the worst seats in the house. At the Lincoln Theater, on 49th and Woodland, for instance, African American patrons were forced to sit on the right side of the theater, from which the sight-lines of the movie screen were inferior due to an obstructed view. And throughout the next several decades, African American theater-goers experienced similar forms of discrimination at a number of other Philadelphia theaters including the Stanley, the Aldine, the Mastbaum, and the Earl.⁴⁹⁴

It is not surprising, then, that the *Philadelphia Tribune* praised John T. Gibson for purchasing the Standard Theater in 1914, for its editors and writers had whole-heartedly believed that Gibson would help to usher in a new era for Philadelphia’s black theater patrons. In a front-page story in which the paper expressed its support for the acquisition (which was originally a lease and soon after a purchase) entitled “J.T. Gibson Breaks Up Discrimination,” it stated that:

We are pleased to announce that one of our citizens has leased the Standard Theater. For a term of years and dispensed with the services of all of the former employees. Therefore our citizens need not fear of being insulted when they attempt to go to the Standard Theater in the future, under the new management the theater will be known as Gibson’s New Standard Theater.⁴⁹⁵

When Gibson’s New Standard Theater opened for its first performance on January 19, 1914, the *Tribune* reported that both Philadelphia’s African American “society folk” as well as the community’s working-class citizens filled the house to capacity.⁴⁹⁶ These individuals were treated to a showing of J. Leubrie Hill’s musical-comedy “My Friend From Kentucky” featuring the talented J. Leubrie Hill himself along with a cast comprising his famous “Darktown Follies” company consisting of “60 Colored Stars.”⁴⁹⁷ The *Tribune* raved that those in attendance had seen the “best show in this city for many years” (the musical

apparently had so enchanted Florenz Ziegfield that he purchased the rights to several of its songs to be included in his immensely successful white-vaudeville show Ziegfield's Follies upon seeing it at the Lafayette Theater in Harlem only several months earlier).⁴⁹⁸

Upon the arrival of the theater's one year anniversary, the *Tribune* printed a letter of gratitude praising Gibson and his venue, signed by many of Philadelphia's most prominent African American citizens. The letter began by stating that "The undersigned citizens of Philadelphia congratulate you on this, the first anniversary of the opening of your new play-house, The Standard," and also commended Gibson for providing a first-class performance venue for African American artists, stating that "you have risen to the occasion splendidly and furnished an avenue through which Negro play-writers and players may give the public expression to their arts."⁴⁹⁹ Among the letter's distinguished signers had included African American physicians, undertakers, bankers, real-estate brokers and printers, such as: Algernon B. Jackson, the only African American surgeon on the staff of Mercy Hospital (Mercy, founded in 1907 by Henry Minton, was one of two African American hospitals in the city at the time, the first being Frederick Douglass Hospital founded in 1895 by Nathaniel F. Mossell who incidently also led the protest to end the showing of Thomas Dixon's racist *Clansman* at the Walnut Street Theater in 1905); The Honorable George Henry White, the aforementioned former congressman from North Carolina, who in 1905 opened a successful law practice and land-improvement association in Philadelphia; G. Grant Williams, then editor of the *Philadelphia Tribune*; and Charles H. Brooks, the distinguished lawyer and head of the Reliable Mutual Aid and Insurance Society. The *Tribune* hit the nail on the head when they printed the letter under the title of "Manager Gibson's Worth Appreciated," as Philadelphia's African American community was indeed profoundly indebted to the theater owner's accomplishment.⁵⁰⁰

Members of Philadelphia's African American community who patronized Gibson's New Standard Theater during Gibson's seventeen year reign as manager and owner were treated to a beautifully decorated, first-class theater. Containing 1500 seats and sporting a luxurious interior, the theater was decorated with "gold, purple, marble, and tints of rose," and was compared to a "fairy land" by one observer.⁵⁰¹ Gibson primarily booked all-black vaudeville acts and all-black musical-comedy performances, in which large casts of up to 75 African American performers could be involved. Among the most notable performers and companies to grace the theater's stage were artists who were also multi-talented as they often wrote, produced, and acted in their own traveling productions, such as the aforementioned J. Leubrie Hill, S.H. Dudley, the brothers Salem Tutt-Whitney and J. Homer Tutt, and the

brothers Flournoy, Qunitard and Irvin C. Miller. In addition, many early female blues singers performed at the Gibson's New Standard during the 1920's, including Mamie Smith (whose famous song "A Good Man is Hard To Find" actually debuted at the Standard), Bessie Smith, Alberta Hunter, Trixie Smith, and Chester Pennsylvania's very own storied blues and jazz songstress (and also notable stage, film and television actress) Ethel Waters. Of course, we should not forget that many other popular acts appeared at the Standard over the years as well, such as the notable black vaudevillian husband and wife comedy-team Butterbeans and Susie, as well as the comedian Sandy Burns, the comediennes, dancers and singers The Whitman Sisters, and the tiny "Princess Wee-Wee."⁵⁰²



The New Granada Theater in Allegheny County, 2010. From Bureau for Historic Preservation Archives. Used with permission.

Prior to Gibson's purchase, African American vaudeville entertainers or dramatic artists were typically booked at the city's low-rung vaudeville or burlesque houses. This was certainly the case, for example, when The Negro Players, a well-renowned dramatic and musical troupe featuring the future NAACP Spingarn award winner Charles Gilpin, were much to their chagrin only allowed to appear at the Casino Theater on 8th and Walnut Streets in the fall of 1913.⁵⁰³ Gilpin's experiences were not unique

however, as during the first quarter of the 20th century many African American performers with the exception of individuals such as the crossover performer Bert Williams, could not play at decent white establishments for good pay. Yet the rise of the Black Theater movement in cities such as Philadelphia (The Standard in 1915), Chicago (The Pekin--opened by Robert Mott in 1905), New York (The Lincoln in 1910 and the Lafayette in 1912) and Washington D.C. (The Howard in 1910) along with a theater circuit called the T.O.B.A., established during the 1920's to help book black actors at either white or black venues helped to change these circumstances.

But a controversy was arising in the national African American community about the meaning, interpretation and definition of "legitimate" theater vs. vaudeville and its significance to black consciousness, and by the late teens it was one that would play out locally in the establishment of another African American theater in Philadelphia.⁵⁰⁴

When the African American businessman E.C. Brown established the Dunbar Theater at Broad and Lombard in 1919, his undertakings represented this dilemma, as even the *Tribune* began to comment upon Gibson's Theater as a possible anathema. For instance, articles and advertisements were run commenting that Gibson's theater presented actors and vaudeville acts that demeaned and stereotyped African Americans, and thus when the Dunbar had opened the *Tribune* proclaimed that through investment, one could finally become "part-owner" in a "Real Modern High Class Theater." And when the all-black dramatic stock company The Lafayette Players was founded in Harlem, their Philadelphia branch found it difficult to be booked in white theaters within the city and also had not intended to play at Gibson's New Standard. Gibson defended his theater and its shows, however, noting that black vaudeville acts were both therapeutic and redeeming, and he asserted that "I believe in comedy for recreation, in the atmosphere of which we can rest in ease, safe in the knowledge that the generated laughter will soothe the nerves and in time will cure the most extreme case of nervousness." Additionally, he insisted that his theater was a place for families, and he argued that his mostly African American booked performers often wrote their all-black musical-comedies or vaudeville shows with plots centered around the issues of the day facing the black community.⁵⁰⁵

Ultimately, however, the whole controversy became moot, since in August 1921 Gibson purchased the 1600 seat Dunbar from Brown and his Quality Amusements Corporation for the price of \$425,000. By this time, Gibson, who was now 43, had amassed a fortune of over a half-million dollars and owned a mansion in the Philadelphia suburb of Meadowbrook, Pennsylvania. Gibson was growing even more committed to the welfare of Philadelphia's African_American community, and he showed this commitment in two distinct ways throughout the 1920's: first by continuing E.C. Brown and the Dunbar Theaters' advocacy of "legitimate" theater by exhibiting drama as well as the top-notch musical comedies of the day in his newly renamed Gibson's New Dunbar Theater; and second, as he used both of his theaters as sites to gather for community causes during the 1920s by holding benefits at each establishment supporting issues ranging from rallies to end school segregation to raising funds for Douglass Hospital.⁵⁰⁶

While Gibson's New Dunbar Theater saw the Lafayette Players continue as the theater's main dramatic acting troupe in-residence, Gibson himself was also able to book some of the 1920s most successful African American musicals for his stage, such as "Shuffle Along," "Runnin' Wild," "Chocolate Dandies," "Liza," "Dinah," and "Struttin Time," just to name a few. "Shuffle Along," which was originally produced in tandem by Noble Sissle, Eubie

Blake, Flournoy E. Miller and Aubrey Lyles, was the show responsible for bringing black shows back to Broadway, absent there since the early years of William and Waker, Cole and Johnson. Meanwhile, Irvin C. Miller's "Dinah" featured the famous "Blackbottom" dance, and Flournoy E. Miller's and Aubrey Lyle's "Runnin' Wild" was the show that spawned the "Charleston." With casts featuring the likes of Ethel Waters, Alberta Hunter and Adelaide Hall, the shows typically brought down the house. Eddie Hunter's "Struttin' Time" for instance invoked a frenzied audience applause, and Sissle and Blake's "Chocolate Dandies" was a huge success at Gibson's New Dunbar, with many patrons reporting to the *Tribune* that they believed it was even better than "Shuffle Along."⁵⁰⁷

Concerning the use of the theaters as venues for community activism, both the Standard and the Dunbar also served Gibson's growing civic-minded sense of duty during the 1920's. For instance, Gibson leased out his theaters to the Philadelphia Branch of the NAACP, as well as to a variety of religious and fraternal organizations, all of whom were on the same page in the struggle to end school segregation. Sixteen Jim Crow schools were targeted by the groups as being the ones with the most inferior conditions, and the subsequent rally held at Gibson's Theater (formerly Gibson's New Dunbar which changed its name to Gibson's in 1926) on Sunday December 5th, 1926 was attended by several thousand people. In addition, large fundraisers and benefits were given in 1925 and 1927 at Gibson's Theater and another at the Standard in 1930 in order to raise money for the Douglass Memorial Hospital, Philadelphia's first African American hospital. And, finally, in an event that perhaps underscored the theater magnate's growing commitment to civil rights, he let his Gibson's Theater be used as a venue for an anti-lynching rally on March 27, 1927. The guest speakers were Sam Lowman and Assistant Secretary of the NAACP Walter White, the former there to speak out about a horrific case in which he lost his daughter and son-in-law to a lynching in Aiken, South Carolina that previous year. A "capacity house" came out to see White and Lowman speak, and the day was one of great passion and sorrow.⁵⁰⁸

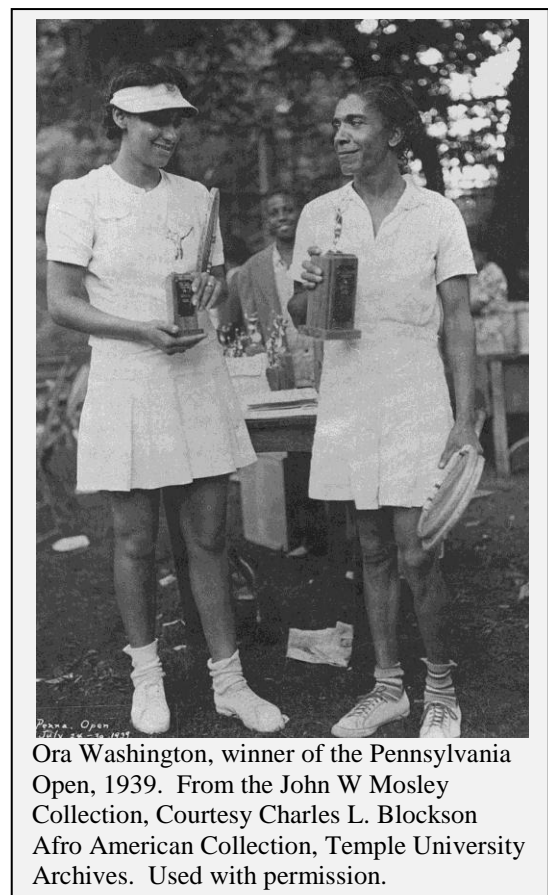
Sadly, however, by the late summer of 1931, John T. Gibson had lost both his Gibson's Theater and his Standard Theater to sheriff's sales. While elegies to Gibson run in the *Tribune* postulated that he had lost his theaters due to both the Great Depression and a string of bad investments, other contributing factors were the rise of the radio and phonograph coupled with the 1929 origins of talking motion pictures, all of which took a large chunk of patrons away from vaudeville and dramatic theater houses. And although Gibson had recently mandated a new policy to show motion-pictures more frequently in his theaters, the move was undertaken a little too late. But perhaps even more crucial was the fact that by the

late 1920s many of Philadelphia's approximately 200,000 Black citizens were migrating out of the areas surrounding South Street wards to points north and west in the city, and as a result the Pearl Theater on 21st and Ridge was fast becoming the new hot-spot for both African American talent and theater patrons. In addition, the Douglass Theater on 45th and Fairmount and the Royal on 15th and South also lent a hand in lowering the final curtain on Gibson's theaters. As such, when Gibson finally died almost penniless in his small West Philadelphia house in 1937, an important chapter in Philadelphia's as well as in the state and nation's African American history had ended.⁵⁰⁹

African American Entertainment Venues in Pennsylvania from the 1930s to the 1950s

An amazing primary source for investigating sites of African American entertainment by mid-century is *The Negro Motorist Green Book: An International Travel Guide*. In the 1949 edition, we see listed a number of African American tourist and local destinations listed in the state of Pennsylvania taken from a broad geographic cross-section, such as the Harris Hotel in Bedford, an African American owned and operated hotel whose proprietor at the time was George W. Burton. Listed under the hotel advertisement for the establishment located on Penn and West Streets were the phrases "Cozy Rooms" and "Maid Service" as well as "Best of Meals-Wines & Liquors." We know from several interviewees that this hotel also had music and entertainment, and additionally had

operated as a place that housed Bedford Springs seasonal workers and young men from the surrounding African American CCC camps during the 1930s. In Chester, Pennsylvania, we see that Wright's Tavern is listed, as well as the Harlem and Moonglow Hotels, and the Rio Restaurant is also mentioned as a good place to stop. In Darby the Golden Star tavern is mentioned as a place to go, located at 10th and Forrester, and in Erie the Pope Hotel is cited as a good resting spot. Back in Philadelphia we see several new nightclubs enter the scene, such as the "Cotton Club" on 21st and Ridge, "Café Society" at 1306 W. Columbia Avenue,



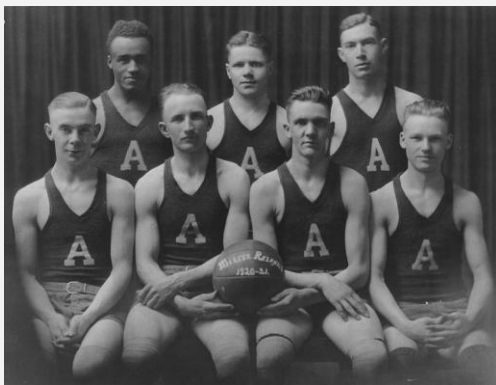
Ora Washington, winner of the Pennsylvania Open, 1939. From the John W Mosley Collection, Courtesy Charles L. Blockson Afro American Collection, Temple University Archives. Used with permission.

“The Crystal Room” at 1935 W. Columbia Avenue, the “Zanzibar” at 1833 W. Columbia Avenue, and the “Progressive” at 1415 S. 20th Street. In Pittsburgh, many Wylie Avenue hotels are listed, such as the “Palace Hotel” (1545 Wylie), the “Colonia” (Wylie & Fulton Streets), the “Park” (2215 Wylie), and the “Ave” (1538 Wylie). While there are no nightclubs listed under the Pittsburgh area in the *Green Book*, there are several restaurants including “Scotty’s” on 2414 Center Avenue, and “Dearling’s” on 2525 Wylie Avenue. Finally, in Washington, Pennsylvania, the Thomas Grill (located on N. Lincoln Street) is listed under night clubs, and the Shaw Hotel is listed as a popular spot in Wilkes Barre.⁵¹⁰

One place not mentioned but which would be an active spot for much of Southwestern Pennsylvania during the 1940s and beyond was the Arch Tavern, at the corner of Clarendon Avenue and Sixth Street in the steel town of Monessen. According to Cassandra Vivian, the African American owned and operated Arch Tavern had been “formerly owned by the Finnish Socialists, but bought by Callie Mickle and his wife Bertha during the 1940s. The Arch Tavern “attracted Count Basie, Cab Calloway, Ella Fitzgerald, Ray Charles, Duke Ellington, and Dinah Washington,” among its amazing acts, and Vivian says that the site also operated as a “community center” as well. Vivian also has mentioned that the Tavern was laid out with a pool hall on the first floor and a restaurant and bar on the second. Furthermore, she states that:

Diners would enjoy the wild game fare, shot by Mickle himself, in the woods of around the city. It was very common to see groundhog, squirrel, opossum, and deer on the menu. The third floor of the yellow brick building was the ballroom. The young kids

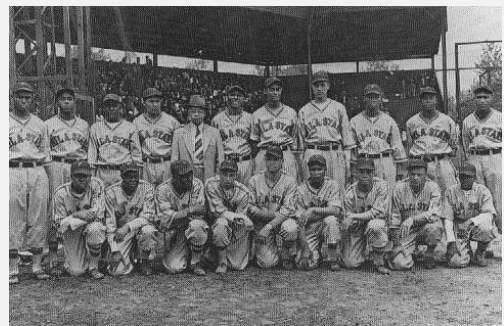
could skate there during the week, but on Sunday night, the big names in music would come for entertainment. Eventually, the Arch Tavern was purchased by the Fellowship Church, but later burned to the ground.⁵¹¹



Reznors, Mercer basketball team, 1921-1922. From Mercer County Historical Society. Used with permission.

Baseball

Baseball in Pennsylvania began at least as early as Octavius V. Catto had formed his “Pythian Baseball club” in 1866. Roger Lane noted in *William Dorsey’s Philadelphia and Ours: On the Past and Future of the Black City in America*, “the main problem in the early days was finding a field as it was difficult for African American ball players to utilize the green pastures of nearby South Philadelphia on account of the ‘deadline’ set up along Bainbridge Street by hostile Irish-Americans.” Lane further noted that players from the club often had to travel to Fairmount Park or cross “the Delaware into Camden” to find a suitable playing field. In terms of the cost to become a member of the club, Lane wrote “it was relatively expensive” because dues were five dollars. While the Pythians played for the Unofficial Colored Championship of the United States against the Mutuals of Washington, D.C., they had to settle on playing only other African American teams, such as one in Harrisburg or their rival, Philadelphia’s Excelsiors. The Pythians sent a delegate to petition the Pennsylvania State Convention of Baseball Players to seek admittance to the group, but the organization turned the individual away and the players “were officially barred from playing the organized white teams in the state, a prelude to the later color bar in professional baseball.”⁵¹²



The Philadelphia Stars, n.d. From the John W Mosley Collection, Courtesy Charles L. Blockson Afro American Collection, Temple University Archives. Used with permission.

The details surrounding the sending of an emissary to the Pennsylvania State Convention of Baseball Players in Harrisburg are fascinating. What survives is the letter he presented to the club officials, stating that he withdrew the petition because of the hostility of the white teams. This unnamed delegate’s letter, dated December 18, 1867, is quite revealing. It opens by informing Catto and the team leaders that “the delegate appointed by this club to represent them in the Pa. State Convention of Baseball Players



Mercer’s first football team, c. 1897. From Mercer County Historical Society. Used with permission.

which met at Harrisburg on the 16th of October last, respectfully reports that on the night of the fifth of October he proceeded to Harrisburg and put up at the Lochul House where he met Messrs. Hayhurst and Ellis of the Athletic B.B.C. and other delegates to the Convention.”

The delegate then went to the convention, but when he asked if there was enough support for the team's admittance, he learned "the majority of the delegates were opposed to it" and they advised him to withdraw the application. At first he refused to do so, hoping that a resolution would be passed, allowing the team's entry into the league, but the delegates began stalling, insisting "the matter be deferred until evening when in all probability there would be a larger no. present." The motion was essentially tabled, and the resolution admitting the Pythians into the league dismissed.⁵¹³

With the Pythians and the Harrisburg African American baseball teams acting as trailblazers from the late 19th to the mid-20th century, a number of black baseball teams and leagues existed. In Chester County alone, at least nine teams were organized between 1878 and 1883. The teams and the dates of their organization included the Athletics, April 18, 1879; the Alerts, July 11, 1884; Captain Jonathan Bell's Team, made up of "Colored Employees from the Brick Yard," September 7, 1883; the Picked Nine, September 7, 1883; the Crescents, August 9, 1888; Our Boys, July 11, 1884; the Quicksteps, March 29, 1890; and the Thomas Spence Colored Baseball Club of West Chester and the Coatesville Colored Team, for which no founding dates are known but scholars have been able to document their existence prior to 1884. County newspapers contain numerous references to African American baseball games during the 1880s and 1890s, including the matchup, on August 8, 1885, between the Coatesville Colored Team and the West Chester's Thomas Spence Colored Baseball Club. The *West Chester Daily Local News* reported, "On Thursday last the Thomas Spence (colored) Baseball Club, of West Chester, came to Coatesville to play their brethren of this place." The newspaper described the game as "a long and interesting one," adding, "in the sixth inning the game stood 19 to 14 in favor of the Spence Club." The game ended, 24 to 23

points, with the Thomas Spence club winning...

On June 23, a black team from Lancaster, the Grays, traveled to Coatesville to play the Alerts. The game was played at Ninth Avenue and Chestnut Street in Coatesville's East End, and the Alerts won, 28 to 13. According to the newspaper reporter, "the game attracted considerable attention, there being some 300 persons present."⁵¹⁴



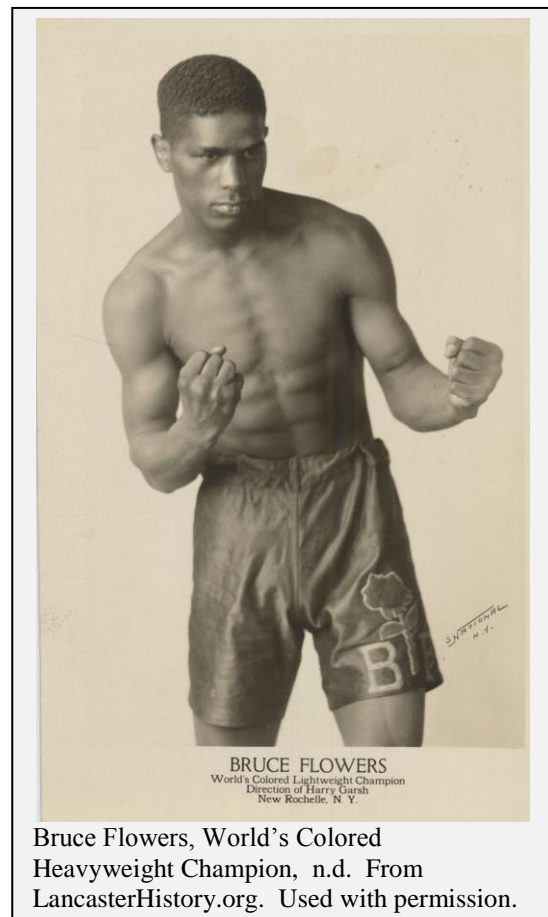
Willie Mays awarding trophies at Kay Boys Club sports banquet, c. 1960. From Carnegie Museum of Art. Used with permission.

While the Darby Borough Hildale Club, the Philadelphia Stars, the Pittsburgh Crawfords,

and the Homestead Grays became the seminal teams to play in the Negro League throughout much of the early to mid-20th century, it was much less known that a number of semi-professional Negro League teams also existed in the Commonwealth, many of which hosted exhibition games and played local white semi-pro and company teams. On May 31, 1929, the local press noted that the Gettysburg Giants, a “colored baseball team,” were to take on the “Frederick colored team” at “the high school diamond.” A player, Roy Moser, “known to many of his friends as ‘Kid Lightning,’” would “do the hurling for the Gettysburg Giants,” while “William Jones will do the receiving.” In 1931, it was reported by Monessen *Daily Independent* that the Donora Athletics, “one of the strongest colored baseball teams in Western Pennsylvania,” was to play the Homestead Grays at Page Park on May 1. The July 17 edition of the *Daily Courier*, published in Connellsville, reported, “St. Rita’s Colored Nine and colored Veterans of Foreign War will clash on Thursday afternoon at 5:15 O’clock at Duggan’s Field, 13th Street, West Side.”⁵¹⁵

Harness Racing in Southwestern Pennsylvania

Interviews with several African American residents of Bedford confirm harness racing was not only popular, but several local black riders owned their own horses and won local, state, and national races. Phyllis Johnson, discussing the history of African American harness racing in Bedford, recalled that Blair Shawlett was the first black resident to “have his own horses,” as well as to “raise horses.” When asked to provide more details about the development of black harness racing in Bedford, Johnson remembered, “the most well-known black harness man was Albert Washington, who would be Gary Washington’s father. Now, they traveled all over the country, up in Canada—[this was] big-time racing. And they race the same circuits now, but there are no black people from Bedford. And the men that raced in Bedford, most of them—they raced—the county



fairs, and they [never went to the races like the Hamiltonian that Washington had attended], things like that. That was always exciting stuff to hear about and read about, and my up to the Hamiltonian, I would put it very close to the top of the most exciting day I've ever had.”⁵¹⁶

Camps and Parks

Roger Lane notes that by the late 19th century, “only a few cities had begun to build playgrounds” and that “blacks were specifically barred from the contemporary equivalent of fresh-air camps.”⁵¹⁷ Because of this, Lane says, “Sunday Schools were then the only place which provided organized recreation.” Thus large-scale picnics, were often “sponsored” by churches, such as the one in July, 1889, in which several Philadelphia, Bucks and Montgomery County A.M.E. churches got together and held a massive event at Neshaminy Falls, “which the churches had contracted for the day.” Merry Go-Rounds, music, donkeys, boating and ‘two-mission nines’ (baseball) was played.⁵¹⁸ One year prior, in Coatesville in 1888, we see a similar event was organized by area churches as the press commented that “The colored folks...had a gay time at Rock Run, where a picnic was held at Marble platform” in which the entertainment was the previously mentioned Eagle Cornet band as well as “Fiery Dennis” who was an “old time fiddler.” But if we examine the rise of church or secular recreation for African American children in Pennsylvania in particular regarding the formation of summer camps, we see that these did not become formally established on a large scale in the Commonwealth until the 1930s.

For instance, Western Pennsylvania’s Camp James Weldon Johnson was established in 1939 because African American children were frequently kept out of “integrated” day camps. Statistics for 1938 reveal that only 47 campers out of “12,000 Alleghany County children” attended the area’s camps. According to the history of the camp, “to meet the need for summer camping opportunities for black children, the Urban League of Pittsburgh set into motion a plan to establish a camp for Negro Children.” After this call went out, Robert L. Vann., editor of the *Pittsburgh Courier*, donated enough money to “reserve the 150 acre camp site in Raccoon Creek State Park located in the beautiful foothills of the Allegheny Mountains.” R. Maurice Moss, executive secretary of the Urban League, raised funds from speaking engagements and as had Urban League board member Dudley King. In 1939, the camp opened, named in honor of James Weldon Johnson, poet, author, and civil rights activist.⁵¹⁹

Through the years, “boys and girls ranging in age from 7 to 17 years came from all sections of the city and county communities” to attend the camp, including “Braddock, Verona,

Sewickley, Coraopolis, Penn Township, McKeesport, Duquesne, Clairton, Farrell, and Homestead.” As part of the camping experience, “twenty-four campers with their four counselors in each of four units planned their programs independently,” choosing names for their cabins such as the Brave Young Eagles, for boys ages seven to eleven; Mademoiselles, for girls between the ages of twelve and seventeen; and Kingsmen, for boys twelve to seventeen years old.. The campers “participated in a wide variety of program activities in small and large groups,” including hiking, outdoor cooking, athletics, team games, swimming, handcrafts, nature lore, story-telling, dramatics, and group singing.” The camp enjoyed only have a twenty-eight- year run and closed in 1967.⁵²⁰

A 1953 bulletin for the camp listed its goals: “Camp Johnson gives boys and girls the opportunity for fun, adventures, and new skills in a variety of interesting activities. . . . There are clay modeling and dramatics, music and dancing and song-writing and newspaper work.” The brochure emphasized “at the lake there are swimming and boating, water carnivals, and fishing,” and noted that “campers hike and sleep out under the stars; they learn to build fires and to cook over them.” It also offered: “There are star-gazing and nature games and crafts. They can play ball, shoot arrows or play goofy golf. There are programs and picnics with the neighboring camps. . . . Campers can do all or any of these activities, or they can lie on the good green earth and soak in the sun; they can hang face down over a pool of water, watching a frog; or just sit on the porch railing in the bright light of the moon.”⁵²¹

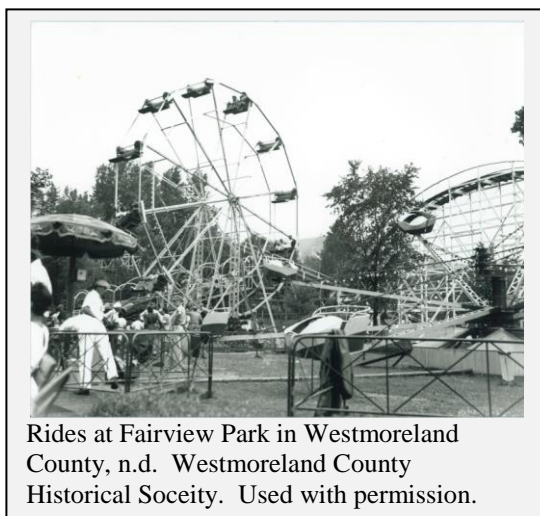
The pamphlet included an attempt to persuade campers and their parents: “There are so many things to do in camp, that program is limited

only by the imagination, creativeness and spirit of adventure of the campers.” The bulletin described the camp’s location and facilities. It also noted the breakdown of the counseling hierarchy and laid out conditions to accept campers. ”Camp Johnson is located in Beaver County, Pennsylvania, 32 miles west of Pittsburgh in the foothills of the Allegheny Mountains,” adding “the camp site extends over 150 acres of beautiful, rolling, wooded country.” Of the facilities, “there are 50 permanent buildings on the grounds,” of which the “screened sleeping cabins accommodate four campers each . . . with a “twelve acre lake for swimming and boating” and “hot and cold running water for washing and showers.” The



Championship track meet at Oliver Field, 1950. From Heinz History Center. Used with permission.

camp's personnel the brochure identified "the director, program director, 16 trained counselors" and "a registered nurse who is in charge of the infirmary." Health requirements and the care of campers were not overlooked. "Each camper must have a physical examination no earlier than five days before coming to camp." Camp programs were "designed to prevent over-stimulation or participation to the point of exhaustion." While the guide ended by stating that the fees in 1953 were forty dollars, it noted "Camp Johnson is a member agency of the Pittsburgh Camp Council, American Camping Association, Health and Welfare Federation, and the Community Chest of Allegheny County" and, therefore, "Your annual gift to the Chest makes possible the reasonable rates and reflects itself in extending camping opportunities to many children unable to pay full tuition."⁵²²



Rides at Fairview Park in Westmoreland County, n.d. Westmoreland County Historical Society. Used with permission.

In northeastern Pennsylvania, Mary J. Cuff founded Camp Cuff. In an advertisement dated June 25, 1960, Camp Cuff, for "Boys & Girls Ages 5-17," was a "beautiful, healthful camp, located in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Pennsylvania at Montrose," where campers experienced "excellent meals, experienced counselors" and "all types of recreation." Rates were twenty dollars weekly, but the camp offered "special rates for more than one in [a] family" and for "campers remaining all season." The

season ran from "June 30 to September 1, and potential applicants were advised to either "write or phone Mrs. Mary J. Cuff" at "413 Reno St., Phila. Pa." or "Mrs. Donald C. Rivera (Director)" at 5939 Nassau rd., Phila. Pa."⁵²³

In interview conducted with Dorris Keane and Margaret Marsh, of Washington, Washington County, Keane distinctly recalled the state of the African American YWCA. "Well, I didn't know what they called it, but I know before it became a YW, Young Women's Christian Association, it was segregated. Because the other one was down on Maiden Street, and the Afro-American was right there and it was a one-room [building] but it was huge. . . . When the YWs combined, became integrated, then we bought it." She mentioned the community's movie theaters were segregated; African Americans attending a show at the Court Theatre "only got the last two to three rows on one side." Her "husband's relative" "hailed the bricks" to build the segregated Basle Theater. Many of the touring African American troupes performed at either the African American Odd Fellows Hall or at the Armory. Vaudeville

entertainers such as Uncle Woodson and musicians, including Speed Flummer and his band, Anna Baker, and the Wheeler Singers took the stage. Keane and Marsh traveled to the African American owned and operated Arch tavern in Monessen, where Lionel Hampton, Duke Ellington, and the Howard Weaver Combo performed. The LeMoyne Community Center, where the interview was conducted, it (and the Forrest House which predated it), was “for the adults, we played basketball” and also partook in activities such as square dancing.⁵²⁴

Interviewee Joyce Ellis, also of Washington, the first African American businesswoman to open a dance studio in the community and the current director of the LeMoyne Community Center, described her recreational experiences as a child and a teenager. She said the Lemoyne Community Center was established in 1956 to serve up to twenty thousand children in southwestern, Pennsylvania because Washington had only one white community center, the Bronson House. She recalled that African American children were not allowed to swim in the Bronson House’s pool. Ellis remembered the white community center had “about 15 to 20 rooms in it,” with “a basketball arena and a huge playground for kids,” yet somehow the Lemoyne Community Center served such large numbers of children in a space that was not truly comparable.⁵²⁵

Notes

⁴⁶⁹ Todd Boyd, ed., *African Americans and Popular Culture*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 2008, i.

⁴⁷⁰ *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 6-12, 1774; 11-2-1749, 6-30-1779; 4-20-1796.

⁴⁷¹ Turner, *The Negro In Pennsylvania*, 50-51.

⁴⁷² John Fanning Watson, *Annals of Philadelphia, and Pennsylvania, in the Olden Time: Being A Collection of Memoirs, Anecdotes, and Incidents of the City and its Inhabitants*. Philadelphia: E.L. Carry and Hart 1830, 351, 352.

⁴⁷³ Turner, *The Negro In Pennsylvania*, 42; Shane White, “It Was a Proud Day”: African Americans, Festivals, and Parades in the North, 1741-1834.” *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 81, no. 1 (June 1994), 18-19.

⁴⁷⁴ Nash, *Forging Freedom*, 220.

⁴⁷⁵ Elizabeth Sandwith Drinker, ed., *Extracts from the Diary of Elizabeth Drinker from 1759 to 1807 A.D.* Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Co. 1889, 306. ;Nash, *Forging Freedom*, 218.

⁴⁷⁶ Drinker, *Extracts*, 338; Nash, *Forging Freedom*, 220.

⁴⁷⁷ Charles Kelley Jones, *Frances Johnson 1792-1844: Chronicle of a Black Musician in Early Nineteenth Century Philadelphia*. Bethlehem: Lehigh University Press, 2006, 9.

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- ⁴⁷⁸ Ibid; Eileen Southern, *The Music of Black Americans: A History*, New York: Norton, 1997, 3rd Edition, 75-77; W.K. Mc Neil, *Encyclopedia of American Gospel Music*, New York: Routledge, 2005, 9.
- ⁴⁷⁹ Southern, *Music of Black Americans*, 111.
- ⁴⁸⁰ Southern, *Music of Black Americans*, 113-114.
- ⁴⁸¹ *West Chester Daily Local News*, 8-4-1883.
- ⁴⁸² *West Chester Daily Local News*. 11-29-1887.
- ⁴⁸³ *West Chester Daily Local News*, 4-28-1888; 5-12-1888.
- ⁴⁸⁴ *West Chester Daily Local News*, 6-20-1892
- ⁴⁸⁵ Charles Blockson, *African Americans in Pennsylvania*, 66.
- ⁴⁸⁶ *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, June 17, 1853.
- ⁴⁸⁷ *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, March 9, 1855.
- ⁴⁸⁸ Lane, *William Dorsey*, 311.
- ⁴⁸⁹ Robert Darden, *People Get Ready!: A New History of Black Gospel Music*, New York: Continuum, 2006, 161.
- ⁴⁹⁰ Ibid., 162.
- ⁴⁹¹ *Philadelphia Tribune*, 6-17-1937, 4.
- ⁴⁹² 1910 United States Census, Pennsylvania, Philadelphia County; Du Bois, *Philadelphia Negro*.
- ⁴⁹³ *Philadelphia Tribune*, 10-11-1913, 3.
- ⁴⁹⁴ Ibid., 3-1-1913, 3; 3-12-1913, Front Page, 3-29-1924, Front Page; 3-14-1929, Front Page; 1-30-1930, Front Page.
- ⁴⁹⁵ Ibid., 1-17-1929, Front Page.
- ⁴⁹⁶ Ibid., 1-24-1914, 3; Clement Richardson, *National Cyclopedia of the Colored Race*, Vol.1, Montgomery, Alabama: National Publishing Company Inc., 1919 325.
- ⁴⁹⁷ Ibid., 1-17-1914, 8.
- ⁴⁹⁸ Ibid., 1-24-1914, 3; Henry T. Sampson, *Blacks in Blackface: A Sourcebook on Early Black Musical Shows*, London: Scarecrow Press, 1980, 93; Lofton Mitchell, *Black Drama: The Story of the American Negro in the Theater*, New York: Hawthorn Books, 1967, 68.
- ⁴⁹⁹ *Philadelphia Tribune*, 2-6-1915, 3.
- ⁵⁰⁰ Ibid.
- ⁵⁰¹ Richardson, *Cyclopedia*, 323-325.
- ⁵⁰² These acts are continuously reported in the *Tribune* from 1914-1931 (also see note 39 for more specific dates); In addition, see the "Retrospective" on the Standard Theater in the *Tribune* on 1-1-1963, 7.
- ⁵⁰³ *Tribune*, 5-3-1913, 8; 5-24, 1913, 3.
- ⁵⁰⁴ Edward A. Robinson, "The Pekin: The Genesis of American Black theater," *Black American Literature Forum* 16, no. 4 (1982): 136-138; Julie Sochen, "Vaudeville and Musical Theater," in Darlene Clark Hine, Rosalyn Terborg-Penn and Elsa Barkley Brown's *Black Women in*

- American: An historical Encyclopedia*, New York: Carlson Press, 1993, 1192; Sampson, *Blacks in Blackface*, 115; Mitchell, *Black Drama*, 39.
- ⁵⁰⁵ *Tribune*, 2-15, 1919, 8; 9-27-1919, 12; 11-19-1919, 3.
- ⁵⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 8-13-1921; 10-16-1926, Front Page.
- ⁵⁰⁷ *Philadelphia Tribune*, 4-9-1921; 12-1-1923; 4-5-1924; 6-14-1924; 6-21-1924; 11-22-1924; 11-29-1924; 6-5-1926; Sampson, *Blacks in Blackface*, 20-22; 30-31.
- ⁵⁰⁸ *Philadelphia Tribune*, 12-4-1926, Front Page; 2-21-1925, Front Page; 1-29-1927, Front Page; 3-20, 1930, Front Page; 3-26-1927, Front Page; 4-2-1927, Front Page.
- ⁵⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 7-9-1931, Front Page; 8-27-1931, Front Page; 6-17-1937, 4; 8-13-1957, 2. In addition, the *Tribune's* entertainment column shifted its focus away from covering the stage to covering radio shows, film and music as of the late 1920s.
- ⁵¹⁰ "Pennsylvania" in the *The Negro Motorist Greenbook: An International Travel Guide*, 1949 Edition, New York: Victor H. Green & Co., Publishers, 1949, 62-65
- ⁵¹¹ Cassandra Vivian, *Monessen: A Typical Steel Country Town*, Charleston, South Carolina: Arcadia Publishing, 2002, 110.
- ⁵¹² David Kenneth Wiggins and Patrick B. Miller, *The Unlevel Playing Field: A Documentary History of the African American Experience in Sport*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003, 34-36; Lane, *William Dorsey*, 323.
- ⁵¹³ "Pythians Seek Admission to Pennsylvania Convention of Baseball Players," December 18th, 1867, in Wiggins, *Unlevel Playing Field*, 35-36.
- ⁵¹⁴ *West Chester Daily Local News*, 8-25-1884; *West Chester Daily Local News*, 6-23-1884. The listed dates of origin were taken from the Baseball Clippings File in the Chester County Historical Society, misc. Baseball Files.
- ⁵¹⁵ Neil Lanctot, *Negro League Baseball: The Rise and Ruin of a Black Institution*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004 and *Fair Dealing and Clean Playing: The Hilldale Club and the Development of Black Professional Baseball 1910-1932*, Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2007; Christopher Threston, *The Integration of Baseball in Philadelphia*, Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2003; Robert Peterson, *Only the Ball Was White: A History of Legendary Black Players and all-Black Professional Teams*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1992; *The Gettysburg Times*, May 31, 1929; *Daily Independent*, April 30, 1931; *Connellsville Daily Courier*, July 17th, 1935.
- ⁵¹⁶ Interview with Phyllis Johnson, September 2, 2008.
- ⁵¹⁷ Lane, *William Dorsey's Philadelphia*, 310.
- ⁵¹⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁵¹⁹ "History of Camp James Weldon Johnson," pp. 1, Clippings File, Heinz History Museum, Pittsburgh.
- ⁵²⁰ *Ibid.*, 1-3
- ⁵²¹ "Camp James Weldon Johnson Bulletin, 1952," Heinz History Center Archives.

⁵²² Ibid.

⁵²³ *New York Amsterdam News*, July 25, 1967.

⁵²⁴ Interview with Dorris Keane and Margaret Marsh, September 23, 2008.

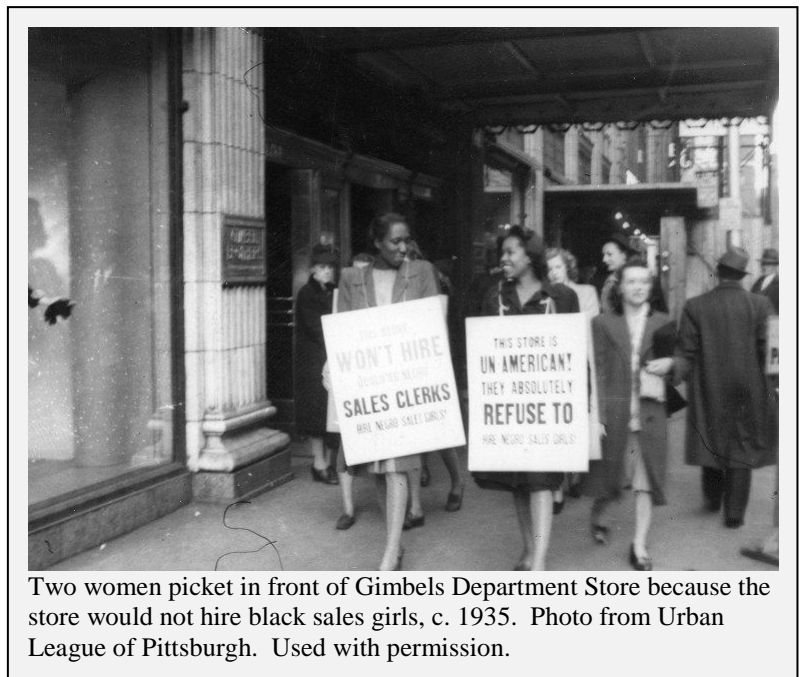
⁵²⁵ Interview with Joyce Ellis, September 9, 2008.

Chapter 8

The Quest for Civil and Political Rights in Pennsylvania, 1644-1965

For more than three centuries black Pennsylvanians have persevered in their quest to be made whole—to exercise the full benefits and responsibilities of equal citizenship. When the Civil Rights Movement burst upon the American stage in the middle of the 20th century, it drew upon all of the earlier institutional and organizational efforts to achieve social, civil and political rights. We tend to think of the movements for civil and political rights as a mid-20th century phenomenon and Southern in its focus. Yet black Pennsylvanians knew that segregation and discrimination were not exclusively Southern phenomena. The African American struggle for “unalienable rights” has been ongoing since the earliest days of their presence in Pennsylvania, in the resistance to slavery, in the campaign for independent churches, in the pursuit of education, and in the search for good jobs. This chapter explores some of the institutions and organizations the African Americans relied upon in the evolution of the “civil rights movement.”

From the beginning, independent churches provided the platform from which other initiatives would be launched. Even after the creation of national organizations such as the Urban League, the NAACP, and the National Council of Negro Women, churches remained a central institution and resource. With the rise of the national organizations, African Americans in Pennsylvania began a new direction in this agitation for equality: they stood for public office; they pressed lawmakers to pass equal rights laws and the courts to uphold them; and they put themselves in personal danger on the streets, at public pools, in restaurants, at universities and public schools, and at the voting booth to achieve equality.



Two women picket in front of Gimbels Department Store because the store would not hire black sales girls, c. 1935. Photo from Urban League of Pittsburgh. Used with permission.

Obviously, people in earlier centuries had no idea they were creating a movement that would eventually compel the Commonwealth to live up to its promises. But from the first protests against chattel slavery the efforts of black Pennsylvanians to create churches, get educations, find fair employment, make decent homes, and vote, over time they became the leaders of the Commonwealth's conscience.

From the time they arrived, Pennsylvania's African Americans have endured great hardships on the road toward attaining civil and political rights. Most of these were caused by prejudice, discrimination, and bigotry, all of which have manifested themselves in at least one of three fashions: 1) in formal terms, such as in the passage of either statewide or federal legislation establishing segregation in the areas of public accommodations, transportation, housing, or in entertainment venues; 2) in visceral terms, such as in the appearance of the many campaigns of white supremacist violence, intimidation, or fear that have been specifically directed against African Americans and have lasted, in some cases, to the present day; 3) or in more implicit terms, such as in the frequent occurrences of racially-tinged hiring and firing practices or extralegal policies and practices that have been carried out for centuries to create an unequal social, political, and economic environment.

Nonetheless, Pennsylvania's African Americans have weathered these tremendous storms with strength and conviction. During the last three centuries they have fought to eradicate such conditions so that they can be rightfully imbued with the full fruits of both state and national citizenship.

As early as 1700, Pennsylvania's colonial legislature enacted legislation curtailing the rights of Free African Americans. In *An Act for the Better Regulation of Negroes* (amended in 1706 and 1726), the law did more than simply reinforce the legal status of slaves within the colony; it also signaled the beginning of a trend in which the enactment of legislation that placed restrictions on the free black population became commonplace. The preamble of the 1726 version of the act, for instance, was quite telling. It defined the Commonwealth's "free negroes" as "an idle, slothful people," and imposed severe constraints on them.

The first of the repressive restrictions fell within the realm of indentured servitude, as it determined that the children of Pennsylvania's free men and free women were required to serve as apprentices until the age of twenty-one for women and twenty-four for men. The legislators decided on this regulation because they saw a burgeoning epidemic of "vagrancy" among the free African American population. The law sanctioned individuals who had suspected others of committing this "crime" to bring the accused before two magistrates. If the indicted parties were found guilty, they were bound to an annual labor contract for a period of at least one year.

The 1726 act was also fraught with other types of restrictive racial language. In its wording concerning interracial marriage, it demanded that violators of this "wrongdoing" be severely punished, but the penalty varied according to race. Individuals of African descent could be sold back into slavery but the guilty white men or women involved in such a relationship were usually just fined. The act also put harsh sentences into place for free African Americans who had harbored or aided fugitive slaves, with penalties ranging from the payment of five shillings to severe whippings, jail, and even enslavement.⁵²⁷

Other legislation enacted during much of the early to mid-18th century made it harder for individuals of African descent living in Pennsylvania to receive equal rights. Legislation passed in 1700 severely curtailed the right of receiving a fair trial, as court cases involving freemen and freewomen were required to be heard by all-white juries, a mode of justice that continued for the following eight decades. According to Edward Raymond Turner, penalties for free African Americans were typically "harsher than those imposed upon white people guilty of the same crimes," and a conviction for "murder, arson, burglary, buggery, or rape" could result in a capital sentence for individuals of African descent but a less severe punishment if the guilty party were white.⁵²⁸

Throughout much of the 18th century, Pennsylvania's legislature enacted and amended laws censuring two other critical rights held by the state's free black population: the right to bear arms and the right to congregate in large groups. No distinction was made in the language of these laws regarding the status of individuals because they applied to both the slave and free black population.⁵²⁹

Despite the inexorable momentum of such legislation during the 18th century, by 1780 the legislative tide turned in favor of providing the state's free black population with at least some semblance of civil rights. *An Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery*, passed by the state legislature in 1780, broached the right to receive a fair trial (although the same legislation did not permit an enslaved person to testify against a free person). The Act was amended to state that crimes committed by individuals of African descent must, with all other inhabitants of the state, "be enquired of, adjudged, corrected and punished, in like manner as the offenses and crimes of the other inhabitants of this state." The act established an idealistic



Marchers in a Philadelphia parade, n.d. From the Pennsylvania State Archives, RG 25. Used with permission.

precedent in regards to the potential for egalitarianism, declaring the Commonwealth's residents, regardless of race, were to be treated essentially as equals. It maintained that "we conceive it is our duty, and we rejoice that it is in our power, to extend a portion of that freedom to [the] other, which hath been extended to us . . . it is not for us to enquire why, in the creation of mankind, the inhabitants of the several parts of the earth were distinguished by a difference in feature or complexion."⁵³⁰

Perhaps the legislature's crowning achievement in endowing individuals of African descent with equal rights came not in the bylaws of the gradual abolition act but in legislation passed a decade later. Legislators attending the 1790 State Constitutional Convention in Harrisburg amended Pennsylvania's charter to include language that essentially provided suffrage to African American males. The wording of a new section on voting rights included a declaration stating that all male tax-paying residents over the age of twenty-one in Pennsylvania, regardless of their property qualifications, were entitled to voting privileges.⁵³¹

Regardless of the late century push for progressive legislation, the reality of the situation was that by the onset of the 19th century African Americans in Pennsylvania were faced with a dire situation when it came to receiving legally sanctioned civil and political rights. Historian Leon F. Litwack, in his seminal work *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States, 1790-1860*, summarized the counterrevolutionary nature of the early to mid-19th century: "In Pennsylvania, for example, instead of a gradual liberalization of his rights, the Negro faced a long period of political disfranchisement, economic discrimination, and social ostracism."

Litwack was correct. Housing conditions were often deplorable. Work was scarce, arduous, or dangerous, and typically did not compensate well. Expecting to enjoy equal rights in the realm of all things social, including public accommodations and transportation, or in entertainment venues, was a fallacy. Tremendous reversals were made in the areas of protecting the right to the freedom of movement, as local ordinances against "vagrancy" or "idleness" were enacted in a similar fashion as had been done with the Black Codes of the 18th century.⁵³²

There was at least one case that occurred early in Pennsylvania's attempt to push back the clock on its African American residents, which provided them with at least a glimmer of hope. In 1813, James Forten (1766–1842), an African American sailor and sail maker in Philadelphia, fought a highly publicized and ultimately successful battle against the enactment of statewide registration and vagrancy legislation. If they had passed, the acts would have limited the freedom of movement of African Americans and controlled the entry of individuals of African descent born outside of the Commonwealth into Pennsylvania.

In his highly influential "Letters from a Man of Colour, on a late Bill Before the Senate of Pennsylvania," Forten effectively influenced state senators with his eloquent plea. He also offered advice to legislators who were considering approval of the act:

The unprejudiced must pronounce any act tending to deprive a free man of his right, freedom and immunities, as not only cruel in the extreme, but decidedly unconstitutional both as regards the letter and spirit of that glorious instrument. The same power which protects the white man, should protect the black . . . The dog is protected and pampered at the board of his master, while the poor African and his descendant, whether a Saint or a felon, is branded with infamy, registered as a slave, and we may expect shortly to find a law to prevent their increase, by taxing them according to numbers, and authorizing the Constables to seize and confine everyone who dare to walk the streets without a collar on his neck—what have the people of colour been guilty of, that they more than others, should be compelled to register their houses, lands, servants and children.⁵³³

Forten may have won the battle, but he lost the war. Pennsylvania eventually tabled the bill, but local authorities in the 19th century ignored the fact that statewide vagrancy ordinances did not exist and simply created their own. In Harrisburg in May 1820, a proclamation was drawn up requiring all free African Americans to register within twenty-four hours of entering the city because the mayor had feared that the sudden increase in the black population would create "turmoil." Such hostility was only the tip of the proverbial iceberg in recounting the story of the erosion of African American rights in the Commonwealth during the early 19th century.⁵³⁴

Scholars have documented that the period from the 1820s through the 1840s witnessed unprecedented racial violence and intimidation. Incidents occurred frequently and with growing ferocity in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. "In Philadelphia it often happened that harmless Negroes were set upon and beaten in the streets, or struck with missiles, or cut with knives, when they were



Protestors march against PTC for refusing to hire African American conductors. From the John W Mosley Collection, Courtesy Charles L. Blockson Afro American Collection, Temple University Libraries. Used with permission.

molesting no one," explained Edward Raymond Turner. During the 1830s in particular, the number of large-scale, city-wide occurrences of anti-black violence grew at an alarming rate, culminating with white mob attacks on African American citizens in Philadelphia in 1834, 1835, and 1838. In Pittsburgh, attacks against individuals of African descent culminated with the destruction of African American tenement houses and loss of life in May 1839.⁵³⁵

Terror and prejudice continued to mount throughout the Commonwealth, but so too did a movement among African Americans to deal with bigotry and hatred, placing them at the forefront of the struggle for equal rights during the 19th century. The African American Convention Movement, with origins in Pennsylvania, was both national and statewide in scope. Leaders from throughout Pennsylvania eventually took part in these events, which typically were held at independent black churches. The movement's groundbreaking national meeting, which drew delegates from seven northern states to discuss the plight of African Americans, was held in September 1830 at Philadelphia's Mother Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church on Sixth Street, between Lombard and Pine.

At the convention, which became known as the Pioneer National Negro Convention, the issue of colonization quickly became the primary agenda item. The delegates believed that only emigration to another country could solve the challenges that had arisen because of the dearth of civil rights in the United States. Pennsylvania's delegates included Richard Allen (1760–1831), elected convention president; Belfast Burton (circa 1772–1849), a Philadelphia physician, elected its vice president; Philadelphia educator (and later writer for the *Colored American*) Junius C. Morel, elected as the convention's secretary and William S. Whipper (1804–1876), entrepreneur and lumber magnate who had represented the interests of much of the southeastern and south central regions of the Commonwealth.⁵³⁶

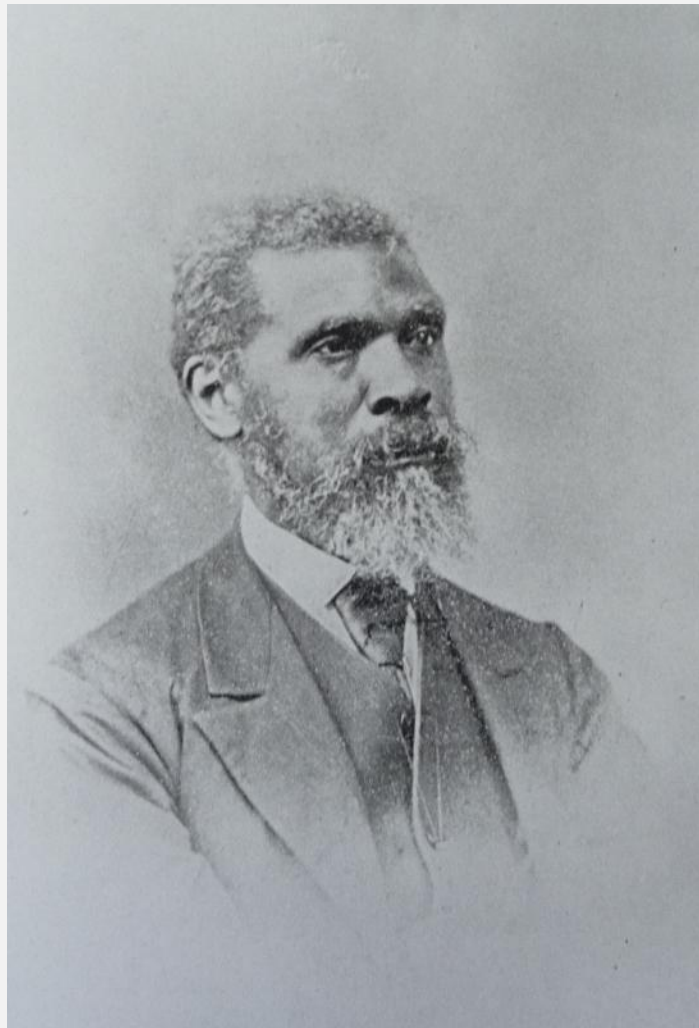
During the convention, these individuals and many of their compatriots authored a monumental document entitled "To the Free People of Colour of These United States," in which they declared that the nation's citizens, regardless of race, were entitled to share in the dream articulated by the Declaration of Independence: "all men are born free and equal, and consequently are endowed with unalienable rights, among which are the enjoyments of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." These men (the movement was chiefly male-based) continued to insist that the ideals intrinsic to this founding document were only theoretical in nature and not truly practiced, and they averred that "viewing these as incontrovertible facts, we have been led to the following conclusions; that our forlorn and deplorable situation earnestly and loudly demands us to devise and pursue all legal means for the speedy elevation of ourselves and brethren to the scale and standing of men." They believed the primary solution that best remedied their dilemma was emigration—which in this case was to "Upper Canada," where they could create a society which they felt would be more egalitarian than was possible in the United States. Only there, they believed, could they live "under [a] government [where] no invidious distinction of colour is

recognized," and where "we shall be entitled to the rights, privileges and immunities of other citizens."⁵³⁷

The following year, in 1831, the National Convention met in Philadelphia's Wesleyan AME Zion Church, between Fifth and Sixth and Lombard streets. Known as the First Annual Convention of the People of Colour, at least three leaders from Pittsburgh's black community joined the delegates from southeastern Pennsylvania who had attended the preliminary convention, including John Vashon, John Peck, and the Reverend Abraham Lewis of Pittsburgh's Bethel AME Church. Peck was identified as a delegate from Carlisle, Cumberland County, to which he had recently moved.

Similar in nature to the Pioneer National Negro Convention, the meeting's agenda focused on emigration to Canada, as its delegates had insisted that the scheme had gained traction throughout the year. They argued, "Our prospects are cheering; our friends and funds are daily increasing . . . already have our brethren purchased eight hundred acres of land—and two thousand of them have left the soil of their birth." During the meeting the participants concentrated on developing a civil rights platform for the United States, specifically focusing on a plan for education. Calling for the creation of an all-black college, they issued a proposal similar in nature to Booker T. Washington's proposal for Tuskegee Institute five decades later.

"A plan has been proposed to the Convention for the erection of a College for the instruction of young men of colour, on the manual labour system, by which the children of the poor may receive a regular classical education, as well as those of their more opulent brethren," they stated. In closing their address,



John C. Bowers, major conductor and station keeper, member of Philadelphia Vigilance Committee, delegate to Pennsylvania anti-slavery society convention, Harriburg, 1873. Photo from Temple University, Blockson Archives. Used with permission.

the delegates protested the actions of the American Colonization Society, an organization which they believed was inherently racist in nature and at the helm of a scheme to involuntarily and forcibly deport individuals of African descent to Africa. This was not the type of voluntary emigration they had espoused with their plan to move to Canada, and felt that a distinction needed to be made between their ideology and the principles of the primarily white-supported institution.⁵³⁸

At the National Negro Convention's 1832 meeting, also held in Philadelphia, delegates began to shift from simply supporting a plan of emigration; they declared in their address that the United States was "Our own, Our native land," and relocation to Canada should be strictly voluntary. The conventioners, among them the Pennsylvania delegates who had attended the first gatherings, decided instead to focus more actively on fighting for civil rights in the United States. They believed these rights were to be endorsed because, as they had asserted, "we have performed all the duties from the menial to the soldier . . . our fathers shed their blood in the great struggle for independence."

This position, however, was laid out even more explicitly the following year at the 1833 National Negro Convention, again held in Philadelphia, during which Abraham D. Shadd (the father of Mary Ann Shadd) of West Chester, Chester County, was elected president. In his keynote speech, Shadd explained it was the constituents' primary objective to end discrimination in the United States, and he pleaded with the nation's leaders to pass legislation to improve what he referred to as the "religious, civil and political condition" of African Americans. The country was at a turning point, Shadd observed, and it was "lamentable that a deep and solemn gloom had settled on that once bright anticipation" regarding the endorsement of civil and political rights. He explained that a "monster, prejudice, is stalking over the land, spreading in its course its pestilential breath, blighting and withering the fair and natural hope of our happiness, resulting from the enjoyment of that invaluable behest of God to man—FREEDOM."⁵³⁹ Emigration to "Upper Canada" continued to be an issue well after the Conventions of the 1830s. Abraham Shadd's daughter, Mary Ann Shadd Cary (1823-1893), published *The Provincial Freeman* newspaper from Canada between 1854 and 1857, which became a major advocate for Canadian emigration.

Although the national conventions occasionally made their way back to Pennsylvania in the following decades, another movement occurred nearly concurrently that proved even more influential in its impact on policies and practices carried out directly in Pennsylvania: the statewide African American convention movement. It's important to understand the evolution of the issue that these conventions declared to be at the center of their agendas during their gatherings—black suffrage. The reason the statewide conventions convened in the first place was rooted in the outcome of a specific case in Bucks County in 1837. The Democratic candidate for the state legislature contested an election in which the Whig candidate had been elected.

The Democrat argued he lost because of voting fraud. He alleged that African American voters in the district had voted for the victorious party "numerous" times and at differing polling places. Bucks County Court of Quarter Sessions Judge John Fox, sided with the Democrats, citing the 1790 Pennsylvania Constitution, which had only implicitly given the right of suffrage to individuals of African descent, but had not unequivocally viewed these same individuals as equal citizens, nullifying their right to vote. In an additional and virtually simultaneous blow to protecting the right of black suffrage in Pennsylvania, the forces of anti-black suffrage scored another victory during the summer of 1837, when a case in Luzerne County, *Hobbs v. Fogg* (1835), was overturned.

In the original case, William Fogg, an African American landowner near Wilkes-Barre, had sued the county for denying his right to vote because of his African ancestry. He initially won because the presiding judge believed the state constitution of 1790 protected the voting rights of free blacks. In a stunning reversal of the case, Justice C. J. Gibson of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court decreed in July 1837 that the reason the language of the 1790 Constitution had been amended to give the right to vote to all "freemen" instead of simply saying "white freemen" was because the terms were considered "redundant." The word "white" was added to the new language of the amended constitution by the reform (and all white) members of the new Pennsylvania Constitutional Convention, and subsequently voting rights were to be taken away for African Americans in the Commonwealth until the repeal of the clause thirty years later.⁵⁴⁰

Immediately after these events unfolded, many of Philadelphia's African American leaders met at John Gloucester's First African Presbyterian Church on Seventh and Shippen (now Bainbridge) streets to draft a memorial against the ruling. Among the individuals who participated were Thomas Butler and John P. Burr, wealthy Philadelphia barbers; the sons of the famous African American sail-maker James Forten, James Forten Jr. and Robert Forten; noted civil rights leader and advocate of African American education, Robert Purvis (1810–1898); and the second bishop of the Mother Bethel AME Church, Morris Brown (1770–1849).

They produced a petition entitled "Appeal of Forty Thousand Citizens Threatened with Disfranchisement, to the People of Pennsylvania," which contained a profound passage:

It may here be objected to us, that in point of fact we have lost by the recent decision of the [Pennsylvania] Supreme Court, in the case of Fogg vs. Hobbs, whatever claim to the right of suffrage we may have had under the Constitution of 1790; and hence have no reason to oppose the amended Constitution. Not so. We hold our rights under the present Constitution none the cheaper for that decision . . . Reject, fellow citizens, the partial, disfranchising

Constitution offered you by the Reform Convention, and we shall confidently expect that the Supreme Court will do us the justice itself and honor to retract its decision. Should it not, our appeal will still be open to the conscience and common sense of the people.⁵⁴¹

Despite the fact that this appeal was ultimately denied several years later, in 1841, African Americans from around the Commonwealth united in a call for political action for suffrage and civil rights. Held in Pittsburgh, the inaugural Convention of the Colored Freemen of Pennsylvania met at the Bethel Church on Front Street on August 23–25. John Peck was elected president, George Gardner and John B. Vashon, vice presidents, Lewis Woodson and John N. Templeton, secretaries, and Martin R. Delany an honorary member of the executive committee.

Among the many delegates who represented African American interests from nearly every county were the Reverend Samuel Williams, a trained barber and pastor of an AME church in Johnstown, Cambria County (who emigrated to Liberia in 1853 as part of Delany's plan to return Americans of African descent to Africa); and Owen A. Barrett, a pharmacist from Allegheny County and the proprietor of Pittsburgh's B. A. Fahnestock's Celebrated Vermifuge, a medicinal outlet frequented by both the city's white and black residents. Also participating were Abraham Shadd, Chester County, Richard Chidester, Fayette County, Nathaniel McCurdy, Greene County, and Philadelphians James Needham and John C. Bowers who were active in the city's abolition movement.⁵⁴²



Photo from the Second National Negro Congress in Philadelphia. Photo from the Pennsylvania State Archives, RG13. Used with permission.

A committee was selected from among these individuals, as well as from among the scores of other attendees, to write, publish, and distribute a circular entitled "To the Colored Freemen of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania." The authors vehemently emphasized their displeasure with the white-supremacist ethos inherent in the amendments to the provision on suffrage carried out at the 1838 reform State Constitutional Convention. They asserted that, "It is impolitic for the state thus to restrict any portion of her

inhabitants, because it degrades them, and in so far detracts from the honor and respectability of the state."

The authors questioned why the Commonwealth would do such a thing in the first place, pondering, "But what is our crime, that such excessive punishment should be inflicted upon us? What abuse have we ever made of this privilege?" The writers replied to these rhetorical queries that they should be able to reacquire the right to vote: "Under all circumstances, and upon all occasions, we have been faithful to our country and obedient to her law... and we deem it but simple justice that we should, in common with others, share its privileges."⁵⁴³

It was seven years before Pennsylvania's African American citizens organized another statewide convention, which took place in Harrisburg on December 13–14, 1848. Recognized as the State Convention of the Colored Citizens of Pennsylvania, the conference was held at the Wesleyan Union AME Church and drew even more members from around the Commonwealth than had the previous meeting. The president of this gathering was John B. Vashon, and the committee selected to oversee the proceedings was made up of individuals from fifteen counties.

The individuals and the regions they represented were:

John B. Vashon, Allegheny County;
Joseph E. Gardiner, Berks County;
Daniel Williams, a prominent barber and father of Daniel Hale Williams, the first African American cardiologist, Blair County;
Charles E. Clayton, Chester County;
William Thomson, Columbia County;
John F. Williams, an Underground Railroad agent and active in the AME Union Wesleyan Church in Harrisburg, Dauphin County;
Nelson Turpin, an AME Zion itinerant minister, Franklin County;
Samuel Molston, Juniata County;
Isaac J. Dickson, Huntingdon County;
Philip Roderic, a well known agent on the Underground Railroad, Lycoming County;
William Whipper, Lancaster County;
David Roach, Mifflin County;
Isaiah C. Weir, Philadelphia County;
John Lee, Schuylkill County; and
William Stanford, York County.⁵⁴⁴

The committee members drafted two separate documents; one leveled at Pennsylvania's white population, and one directed to its African American citizens. In "Appeal to the Voters of the

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania," the conventioners continued the same line of reasoning that they had laid out in their 1841 appeal, declaring:

We recognize you as arbiters of our political destiny, and your sovereignty as the source of power from which the fundamental Laws of this Commonwealth must derive their origin, power, and sustenance We, therefore, address you, as the representatives of the Colored Citizens of this Commonwealth, assembled in Convention from various Counties, for the purpose of petitioning the Legislature for a repeal of the word 'white' from the 1st section of the 3d Article of the Constitution of Pennsylvania.⁵⁴⁵

In the second tract, entitled "An Appeal to the Colored Citizens of Pennsylvania," the delegates described plans for reclaiming their lost right of suffrage, advising African Americans in the Commonwealth:

We intend suing for our rights as men; where the Executive and Legislative branches of the government is the Court, and 400,000 legal voters the jury, our own conduct being the witnesses, and true republican principles the law So they disfranchised us by extinguishing justice—disqualifying merit, assuming condition as their reason, and complexion as their standard Therefore our only hope of effecting a change, in the fundamental laws of this State, is through a successful appeal to the voters thereof, whose sovereign will must direct their future destiny.⁵⁴⁶

No victory came from this battle, despite both the eloquence and strength of the conventioners' argument and the unification of many of the Commonwealth's African American leaders to accomplish such a goal. Just two months before the victory of Union forces during the American Civil War, African Americans in Pennsylvania convened, this time to strategize as to how best to advocate for their civil and political rights that appeared to be imminent in an upcoming post-war environment. The scholar Hugh Davis asserted that the formation of these new rounds of conventions, which were recast in part as the "State Equal Rights Convention of the Colored People of Pennsylvania" represented a turning point in the battle for equal rights, as they focused just as much on the attainment of civil rights as they did on the realization of political rights.

When Pennsylvania's African American leaders held their initial convention at the Union Wesleyan Church in Harrisburg in February 1865, the emphasis was on, in the words of Philadelphia's delegate David B. Bowser, "equal and exact justice." At the convention, John Peck, Pittsburgh, was elected president, William Nesbitt, Altoona, vice president, and Octavius V. Catto, Philadelphia; George B. Vashon, Pittsburgh; and A. T. Harris, Harrisburg, secretaries.

Dozens of individuals made the trek from communities such as Pittston, Birmingham, Wilkes-Barre, Bellefonte, Lewistown, Reading, and Towanda.⁵⁴⁷

The assembly produced and circulated a far-reaching document on civil rights entitled "Address of the Colored State Convention to the People of Pennsylvania," which laid out the "grievances . . . sufferings . . . and outrages" which had been "heaped upon" African Americans. The delegates opened their plea with a forthright statement: "We do not come to you in the spirit of reproachfulness and denunciation; neither do we feel in pleading for equal rights without regard to complexional differences that we are in the least degree selfish." They argued, "On the contrary, we would view if possible, the brightest side of the picture we have to present, and give to our State all honor and credit possible, in this hour of universal rejoicing over the rapid strides our great nation is taking in the direction of universal emancipation and equality before the law."

They also posed a question to fellow Pennsylvanians, "Can it be possible that loyal Pennsylvania will still suffer herself to be dishonored by refusing to acknowledge or to guarantee citizenship to those who have suffered so much?" If the answer to this query was "no," then the Commonwealth would adhere to the idealistic principles inherent in a true democracy and "the evils and outrages will disappear as the dews of morning melt before the morning sun." They concluded, "We ask a calm and careful consideration of the whole subject of our disfranchisement and our suffering originating therefrom."⁵⁴⁸

In a parallel document, the conventioners once again turned their focus to suffrage, and selected committee members drafted a petition directed at Pennsylvania's governing body entitled "A Memorial Presented to the Legislature—February, 1865." They declared that having the right to vote was "the dearest treasure in the gift of any government," and that only through it could one "repel the approaches of despotism and guarantee the possession of all other immunities." They believed

that "to deny such a right to one class of Citizens, while it is accorded to another, without good reason for such discrimination, is manifestly unjust and anti-republican." Couching their argument in the language of their loyalty to Pennsylvania and the Union during the Civil War, convention representatives explained that when "your state capital was endangered, straightaway



Unidentified interracial couple, n.d. Photo from Chester County Historical Society. Used with permission.

a band of Colored men rushed to its rescue." It was an appeal to the sensibilities of those who would appreciate such acts of valor.⁵⁴⁹

In the years that followed, the Pennsylvania Equal Rights League (the organization that conducted the state equal rights conventions for the following decade) operated as an association with offices in more than a dozen cities and advocated for a plethora of civil rights for African Americans. In 1866, the group joined forces with another statewide organization formed to combat discrimination, the Social, Civic and Statistical Association of the Colored People of Pennsylvania. Together, they battled streetcar segregation in Philadelphia.



The association had previously embarked upon such a crusade, in 1860, when it was founded by William Still and Isaiah C. Wears. With the help of its members, as well as constituents from the Colored People's Union League, the three groups successfully advocated for sweeping new streetcar legislation, which was passed by the state legislature in 1866 and enacted the following year. On March 25, 1869, the league realized the efforts of its decades-long black state convention movement when the Fifteenth Amendment, specifically giving the right of suffrage to African American males, was passed by the

Senate of Pennsylvania. Edward Price argued that even the result of this vote would be both close and partisan.⁵⁵⁰

One year later, William Nesbitt of Altoona, Blair County, acting president of the Pennsylvania State Equal Rights League, publicly rejoiced at the news of the Fifteenth Amendment's ratification on February 3, 1870. He called on Pennsylvania's African American residents to set aside April 26, 1870, as a day to celebrate its passage with both celebration and prayer. In Williamsport, scores of African American citizens both marched in and gathered to watch a procession of horse-drawn carriages make their way on Pine Street, draped with signs such as "Free Suffrage and "Equal Rights." The April 27 edition of the *Williamsport Gazette and Bulletin* reported, "Never before yesterday was such a sight as a demonstration of enfranchised colored citizens in the city of Williamsport"

The May 1 edition of the *Franklin Repository and Transcript*, a Republican-leaning newspaper serving Franklin County, reported, "The colored men [in Chambersburg] have every reason to

feel gratified that their day of rejoicing passed off as pleasantly as it did. Their programme was carried out with excellent order. Their friends were pleased with the manner in which they conducted themselves, and their enemies were compelled to acknowledge that there never was a public day in this place attended with so little disturbance." Groups that marched in Chambersburg's parade included the Lincoln Cadets, Rough and Ready Boys, and Stevens Union Star Club.

In the Schuylkill County seat of Pottsville, banners were placed on carriages with phrases such as "The Fifteenth Amendment Grants the Proudest Title—American Citizen," and "A free ballot the safe-guard of the Republic," with prayer services and speeches following the parade at "The African Church." In Scranton, 600 people attended the event, which was deemed "an entire success."⁵⁵¹

In spite of the many festivities that took place throughout Philadelphia, such as the one held at Horticulture Hall where Frederick Douglass and Robert Purvis spoke after a day replete with speeches, parades, and pageantry, somber circumstances were unfolding after the amendment's ratification. Ira Brown, a scholar of the African American experience in Pennsylvania, contended, "There was one foreboding note; shots were fired at some of the marchers on their way home."

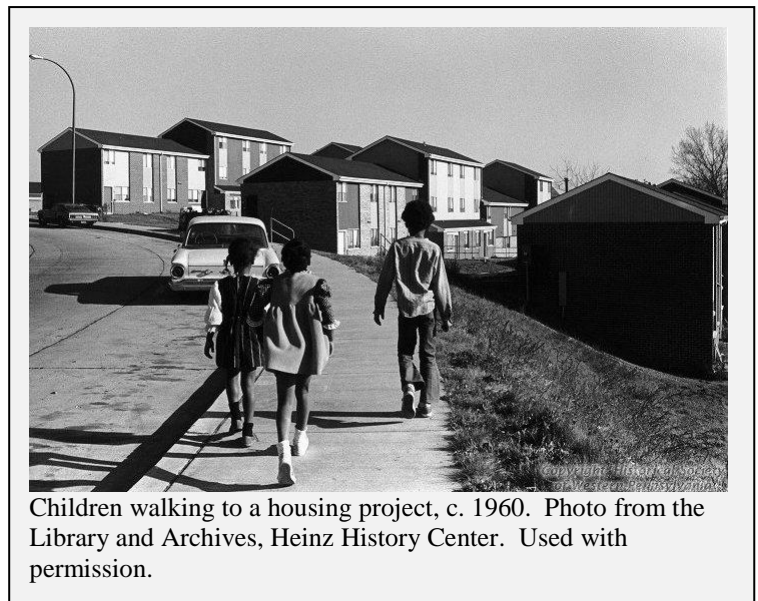
Although no one was injured in this case, Brown was correct to declare that these events would in fact be ominous, because in the elections of the fall of 1871, disturbances erupted in several of the city's voting wards, including the fourth, fifth, seventh, and sixteenth. Initiated at least in part by a fight in the seventh ward in which a group of young white men obstructed voters from casting their ballots, wide-scale mob violence eventually ensued throughout the city. Marauding bands of white thugs attacked African American individuals and businesses, sending forty black citizens to the hospital and resulting in the deaths of three men. One of the victims, Octavius V. Catto, was most likely the specific target of some of the rioters, making his death essentially an assassination.

Catto, who had been one of the leading civil rights activists in the city for more than a decade, had only one year earlier given a speech at the Union League on behalf of the State Equal Rights League, asserting that "the Black man knows on which side of the line to vote." That side was for the Republican Party, the "Party of Lincoln," for in Philadelphia there were many Democratic voters who had been sympathetic to the Confederacy. In reality, many of the city's Republican voters and legislators did not want to see African Americans enfranchised, often leaving William Kelley, the Radical Republican congressman, to stand by himself. Catto's death was a reminder of things past and a sign of things to come for Pennsylvania's African American citizens as the 19th century was coming to a close. More importantly, it was a warning sign that portended a new era of legalized and de facto segregation and racial violence.⁵⁵²

Scholar Rayford Logan has termed the period covering the final part of the 19th century and lasting well into the early years of the 20th as "the nadir of American race relations." His description was pointedly twofold: the era was replete with numerous reversals in the areas of both civil rights and voting rights legislation, and the period witnessed an increase in the incidences of white violence and intimidation directed at African Americans including (but not limited to) the creation of white supremacist organizations whose influence eventually spread throughout much of the North and the South.

The federal Civil Rights Act of 1875 was reversed in 1883 by the United States Supreme Court, which determined it "unconstitutional." Many Southern states held constitutional conventions to amend their bylaws to disenfranchise African American voters through loopholes such as literacy clauses and poll-taxes. Elected black officials were systematically and violently purged by many localities, underscored by cases such as the Wilmington, North Carolina, race riot of 1898, which was directed at both African American voters and legislators. *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) also occurred during this era, ushering in the Jim Crow era of "Separate but Equal" for the following six decades. African American migrants from the South relocated to the North in record numbers looking for employment and escaping the injustices of the South, only to find that the racial climate in the North was often not much better.⁵⁵³

Pennsylvania was one of the places where the struggle between the forces of progressivism and intolerance usually resulted in a charged tug-o-war, and by the close of the 19th century the situation remained unstable at best. One phenomenon that reared its ugly head in the Commonwealth during this period, and one that was in no means just simply confined to the South, was lynching. In Pennsylvania, by the close of the century, several high-profile lynchings took place, and their impact traveled far beyond the Commonwealth's borders. One of these incidents occurred in Stroudsburg, Monroe County, in February and March 1894, and played out over a period of three weeks.



On the evening of February 23, merchant Christian Ehlers invited Richard Puryear, an African American an African American employee of the Wilkes-Barre and Eastern Railroad, to meet him

at his house. Ehlers apparently had done a great deal of business with Puryear, the foreman for a gang of laborers working for the railroad company. Once inside, a "brief conversation upon commonplace matters" ensued. The account of what happened next, however, is suspect.

Newspaper reporters claimed Puryear reached for his gun "without a word or an instant's warning" and shot Ehlers in the head, killing him instantly. He then turned the gun on Ehlers's wife and twelve-year-old son but missed them. After "taking all the money he could find," Puryear fled the house and was caught the following day and charged with murder. On the night of March 1, while Puryear was being held at the county jail, a mob of approximately five hundred people stormed the prison, screaming "Lynch the nigger!" Armed guards repelled the mob, which eventually disbanded. Two weeks later, however, on the evening of March 15, newspapers reported that Puryear "escaped," only to be chased down and lynched by an angry mob of at least fifty people. The newspapers contended that while waiting to be hanged by a rope from a tree limb, Puryear uttered the words, "Do as you please."⁵⁵⁴

The problems with the published accounts of this crime were many. It's odd that Puryear would have killed Ehlers after a conversation that was "commonplace," especially since the two men obviously knew each other well and had conducted business together. If Puryear were a foreman for the railroad company, he enjoyed a relatively high position on the working-class ladder and most likely did not need to take "all the money he could find" from the house. His apparent "escape" seems a bit too convenient and contrived, as it quickly resulted in his lynching. The newspapers' contention that Puryear told the mob he wanted to die (and in that manner) was particularly disturbing. While the real course of events may never be known, lynchings were definitively challenged as indefensible regardless of their rationale.⁵⁵⁵

At the turn of the century, Ida B. Wells-Barnett commented on the scourge of lynching in the United States:

OUR country's national crime is lynching. It is not the creature of an hour, the sudden outburst of uncontrolled fury, or the unspeakable brutality of an insane mob. It represents the cool, calculating deliberation of intelligent people who openly avow that there is an 'unwritten law' that justifies them in putting human beings to death without complaint under oath, without trial by jury, without opportunity to make defense, and without right of appeal.⁵⁵⁶

Wells included Richard Puryear's lynching in her landmark study entitled *A Red Record. Tabulated Statistics and Alleged Causes of Lynchings in the United States, 1892-1893-1894. Respectfully Submitted to the Nineteenth Century Civilization in 'the Land of the Free and the Home of the Brave'*.⁵⁵⁷

An even more notorious lynching took place in Pennsylvania, at Coatesville, Chester County, during the summer of 1911. Zachariah Walker, an African American and a "lever-puller" at Worth Brothers Steel Mill, had apparently "wandered" home late at night after drinking much of the day. After scaring some Polish workers by firing his gun, Walker was stopped by Edgar Rice, a coal and iron policeman, who began questioning him. Walker reputedly shot Rice, killing the officer, and fled to a hideout where he was found by members of the Brandywine Fire Company.

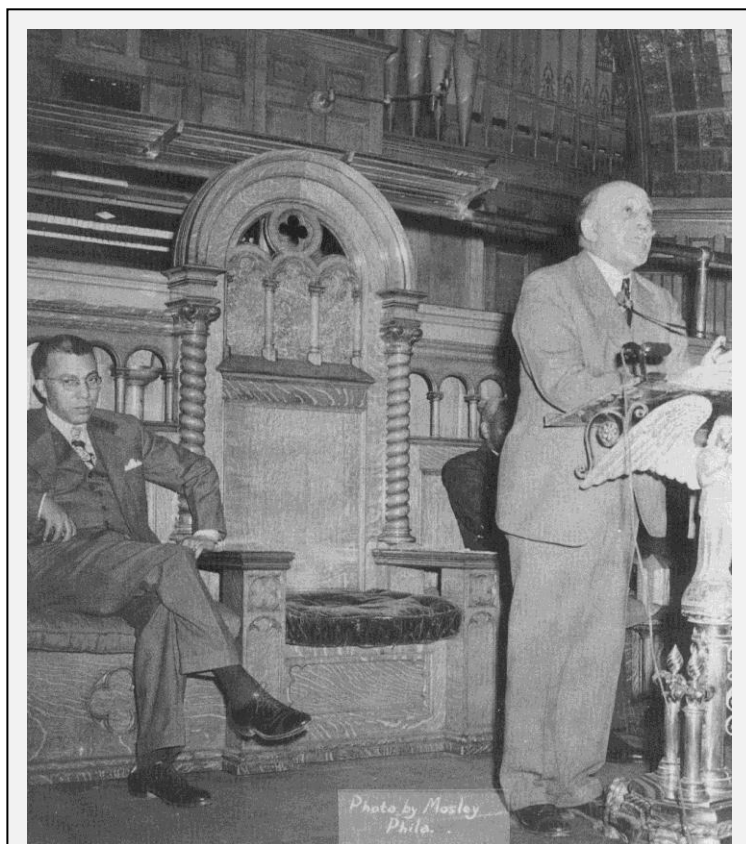
After being captured, Walker would "attempt suicide" by allegedly firing his gun at his own face, but he apparently only damaged his jawbone. Rushed first to the prison and then to a nearby hospital, Walker supposedly confessed to the crime in a cavalier fashion. Raymond M. Hyer and Dennis B. Downey believe that Walker "insisted" that Rice was killed in self-defense. What happened next, however, was the onset of a series of horrific events that had far-reaching consequences in the battle for civil rights both in Pennsylvania and the nation.

A mob estimated at 2,000 white people, including women and children, congregated outside the hospital. A group of men broke from the crowd and stormed the facility, wrenching Walker—still handcuffed to the bedpost—outside. Dragged along Strode Avenue, Walker had rocks and bottles hurled at him, and he was thrown on a burning pyre of wood and straw. Although he tried several times to escape the flames engulfing him, he burned to death. He professed his innocence, but the crowd did not care. After Walker's death, the *Coatesville Record* reported that young boys and men went to a local candy store and drank sodas while talking about the event, also noting that "five thousand men, women, and children stood by and watched the proceedings as though it were a ball game or another variety of spectator sport."⁵⁵⁸

African American leaders from around the country voiced their outrage over Walker's lynching at mass assemblies, and many penned scathing editorials and articles published by the black press. In Philadelphia, Harry W. Bass, an African American attorney and the first individual of African descent elected to the General Assembly of Pennsylvania, held an "Indignation Meeting," which issued a plea to the state legislature on behalf of the Commonwealth's African American residents.

A mass assembly at Pittsburgh's John Wesley AME Zion Church protested the lynching and, after several resolutions were drafted, the call went out to raise money to send several leaders from Allegheny County to Harrisburg to personally deliver the petitions to Governor John K. Tener. "The time has now come for us to do something, to stand up like men," the Reverend Broadax Smith said during the Pittsburgh meeting. "We have had too much mourning and praying. Pray so well and good by keeping your trusty musket near and depend upon it."

The Reverend Reverdy Ransom of New York City's Bethel AME Church agreed with Smith's sentiments, and suggested that African Americans needed to take a two-pronged approach to fighting the menace of lynching. He argued that it was critical to be armed to fight off assailants, and called for the reforming of militias. He insisted that African Americans should elect officials and sheriffs to protect their interests and fight for anti-lynching legislation. In the pages of *The Richmond Planet*, editor John Mitchell declared that the Walker lynching was an alarm for those activists who thought the fight for human rights took place in the South. "Here is a fiendish crime perpetrated in Republican Pennsylvania which now in barbarism vies with Democratic Texas for the selection of the lowest place in fiendish barbarism," Mitchell said.⁵⁵⁹



W.E.B. DuBois speaking at a church, 1945. From the John W Mosley Collection, Courtesy Charles L. Blockson Afro American Collection, Temple University Libraries. Used with permission.

The most influential organization that addressed the developments surrounding the Walker lynching was the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Organized only two years earlier, in 1909, in New York City, the NAACP threw its publicity and weight into speaking out against the lynching and launching a legal crusade for the attainment of justice.

The NAACP essentially worked on three fronts. It immediately dispatched a private investigator to Coatesville to collect information and attempt to influence the prosecution of the case against three individuals eventually indicted for the crime. It used the incident as a clarion call to initiate the process of advocating for state and federal anti-lynching legislation. And it

employed the episode to illustrate the need for opening local branches of NAACP offices across the Commonwealth to fight for civil rights.

The organization was successful in publicizing its outrage and initiating the process of searching for legal means to combat lynching. It also established local chapters in Coatesville, Harrisburg, and Philadelphia. As the NAACP's director of publicity and research (as well as editor-in-chief of its publishing arm, *The Crisis*) W.E.B. DuBois devoted an entire editorial section to the

Walker lynching in the September 1911 edition. He explained why he believed that the lynching of African Americans was an epidemic for Americans:

Blackness must be punished. Blackness is the crime of crimes Why is it a crime? Because it threatens white supremacy. A black might—why civilization might be black! It is therefore necessary, as every white scoundrel in the nation knows, to let slip no opportunity of punishing this crime of crimes.⁵⁶⁰

DuBois and the NAACP were unrequited. The three indicted men were tried on several occasions at both the local and state levels, only to be acquitted every time. Between trials, a mass gathering was held in New York City on December 13, 1911, at the Mt. Olivet Baptist Church, during which DuBois encouraged the audience to support the idea of a march on Washington, D.C., to urge President William Howard Taft to help pass federal anti-lynching legislation.

Another speaker, the Reverend A. Mark Harris, of Jersey City, New Jersey, vented his outrage because the Walker lynchers had seemingly walked away without punishment. "One of the prisoners in the trial resulting from the lynching of 'Zach' Walker in Coatesville," Harris said, "admitted that he had placed a fagot [a bundle of twigs or small tree branches] on the funeral bier. The jury returned with a verdict of 'Not Guilty.' If 'Zach' Walker had been a white man and his lynchers had been negroes, every negro in Coatesville would have been guilty."⁵⁶¹

The 20th Century

Amidst this turmoil the 20th century witnessed new directions in the struggle for equal rights. When many new migrants flooded Pennsylvania's urban and industrial centers looking for employment, they faced the dilemma they had been accustomed to in the South: finding an environment without prejudice. It was virtually impossible to do so, however, because Pennsylvania's social, cultural, economic, and political institutions were as hostile to blacks seeking civil rights as were their former home states in the South.⁵⁶² However, several factors worked, in a backward sort of way, in favor of reformers. First was the simple power of numbers; most black migrants concentrated in the urban industrial centers, where white politicians learned to manipulate their votes for their own advantage. But black Pennsylvanians quickly learned the power of the ballot and began to organize to use it for political strength and to elect their own candidates. Second, while black workers suffered discrimination, low pay and poor working conditions, and while they were barred from white unions and used by management as strikebreakers, eventually their power as a labor bloc became evident to white union organizers. For the preservation of the union movement and labor solidarity eventually white unionists saw the need to integrate, albeit unwillingly and not equally. Third, the idealism

of two worlds wars fought for the principles of freedom gave African Americans a powerful moral argument that appealed to the consciences of white liberals and moderates.

When the First World War ended almost 400,000 African American soldiers returned home from France unwilling to accept the old racist conditions they had previously lived under. So concerned was the Woodrow Wilson administration about the attitudes of black soldiers that the President sent an emissary to warn black troops that "they must not expect the same democracy they had experienced in France.... And should return contented with the same status they had before experiencing democracy abroad." But the warning fell on deaf ears and the next two decades were critical years in forging a coalition and an agenda for civil rights in the Commonwealth. In these years, and then through the Second World War and its aftermath, what historian Thomas Sugrue calls a disparate group of "devout churchwomen, lawyers, laborers, Jews, Democrats, Republicans, Socialists and Communists marched together on picket lines, lobbied public officials, and joined in lawsuits against segregated housing and schools."⁵⁶³ With the leadership of the new NAACP (organized 1909) and National Urban League (organized 1910) black Pennsylvanians took advantage of their numbers, especially in Philadelphia, and voted black legislators into office in state and local government.

The crusade for justice in Pennsylvania which began in the 1920s focused on attaining sweeping civil rights legislation and statewide anti-lynching legislation. Pennsylvania's newly-elected African American state legislators commenced an epic struggle to pass civil rights legislation in the Commonwealth. The late PHMC historian Eric Ledell Smith explained that, "On March 29, 1921, two African American state legislators urged the Pennsylvania General Assembly to grant Black Pennsylvanians full citizenship by passing an equal rights bill." The individuals, John C. Asbury and Andrew Stevens Jr., both Republicans, represented Philadelphia County. Stevens' father, Andrew Stevens Sr., was the founder and first president of the Citizens' Republican Club in Philadelphia, an all-black political organization the likes of which were coming into existence in communities throughout Pennsylvania. The elder Stevens became "the sixth African American ever elected to Philadelphia's City Council" and his son was "cofounder of the Brown and Stevens Bank, served as a board member of the Downingtown Industrial School and the Stephen Smith Home for the Aged and was a past president of Frederick Douglass Hospital", both important institutions that served the black community when others would not do so.

John Asbury was born in Washington County, in western Pennsylvania, and did not move to Philadelphia until twelve years after receiving his law degree from Howard University, Washington, D.C., in 1885. He won renown by winning a hard-fought civil rights case in October 1913, representing, as Ledell Smith maintained, "the family of a black Pennsylvania Railroad Pullman porter who had been killed in a railroad accident."⁵⁶⁴

Voters elected Asbury and Stevens to the state legislature in November 1920. Not much later, they attempted to pass legislation tightening Pennsylvania's 1887 civil rights bill, which had only been loosely enforced at best up until that time. Many challenges to that legislation were undertaken in the early 20th century, including a case in 1914, *Commonwealth v. George Athens*. Athens, who would at first be found guilty of racial discrimination in the operation of his Victoria Theater in Harrisburg by the Dauphin County Court of Quarter Sessions, subsequently had his verdict overturned by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court, which cited *Plessy v. Ferguson* as precedent.

Several attempts to right these wrongs on behalf of African American citizens were made between 1910 and 1920, with the Snyder Bill of 1913 and the Stein Bill of 1915. Neither bill passed through the state legislature nor were they authored by African American politicians. In February 1921, Asbury introduced



Street corner orator, 1940s. From the John W Mosley Collection, Courtesy Charles L. Blockson Afro American Collection, Temple University Libraries. Used with permission.



Cecil B. Moore speaking at a civil rights rally, 1965. From the John W Mosley Collection, Courtesy Charles L. Blockson Afro American Collection, Temple University Libraries. Used with permission.

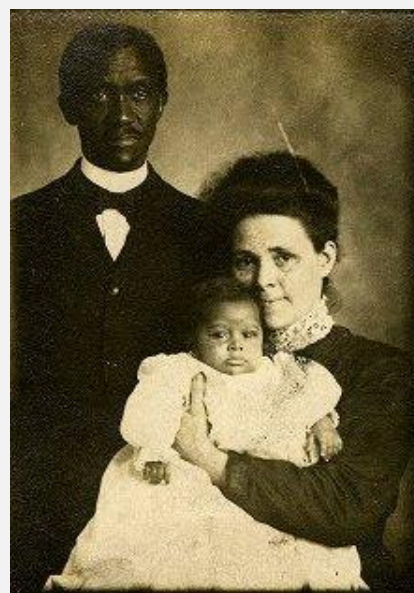
House Bill 269, which became known as the Asbury Bill. The bill had meant to make segregated facilities illegal without loopholes. Ironically, Asbury's case was augmented by the fact that when legislators were invited to the opening of the Stanley Theater in Philadelphia, his ticket for the floor was not respected and he was ridiculed and told to move upstairs to the balcony.

The bill made it out of the judiciary committee in March, and received several readings as well as passage in the house by a sizeable margin later that month (largely because of Asbury's eloquent appeal). It failed in the senate because the issue garnered coverage across both the state and the nation, igniting a strong white supremacist backlash. *The Philadelphia Tribune* complained that the persuasive nature of the forces of fear and intolerance were alive and well in Pennsylvania, citing that the discussion of Ku Klux Klan marches in cities across the Commonwealth had convinced certain state senators to not vote for the bill.⁵⁶⁵

While African American Republican Clubs and political action committees held mass meetings in Pennsylvania in attempts to resuscitate the measure, it was years before Asbury tried again. He coauthored a bill with Stevens in 1923, but it did not make it out of the judiciary committee. Stevens was able to push anti-lynching legislation through the general assembly that year, an impressive victory, but one that was fairly hollow in nature because it primarily dealt with cases in which individuals were forcibly taken from prisons in the process of a murder.

Not until 1935 did a solid attempt at a civil rights bill pass; the Reynolds Equal Rights Bill was signed into law by Democratic Governor George H. Howard Earle III on June 13. The bill provided penalties of up to five hundred dollars and up to sixty days in prison for proprietors of "hotels, restaurants, public eating places, theaters, moving picture houses, schools, colleges, hospitals or public institutions which refuses to serve or otherwise discriminates against a citizen of Pennsylvania because of race or color."⁵⁶⁶

The campaign for equal rights of the inter-war period came at a time when the Ku Klux Klan was beginning to ramp up campaigns of white terror across the country, including Pennsylvania. The Klan claimed over 200,000 members in Pennsylvania at its peak, with possibly a third of that membership in the counties surrounding Philadelphia. There were other strong centers in the Lehigh Valley, the anthracite region and the bituminous coal region.⁵⁶⁷ It also occurred at a time when southern African American migrants were streaming into the Commonwealth looking for jobs, but often met with mass deportations. Racial



George and Mary Turfley and their child, c. 1915. Photo from the Library and Archives, Heinz History Center. Used with permission.

violence was again surging in cities such as Chester, Delaware County, which during the summer of 1917 witnessed days of violence. White gangs assaulted African American individuals and institutions, although they were countered by the local African American community. Philadelphia experienced a similar outbreak of violence during the summer of 1919.⁵⁶⁸

The rise of white violence not only strengthened the resolve of those reformers committed to following legal channels for civil rights, it also nourished a new spirit of self assertion that gave rise to several Black Nationalist and separatist organizations. A Jamaican immigrant named Marcus Garvey became the leader of the largest and most dramatic of these organizations, the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), organized in 1914. Flamboyant and autocratic, Garvey espoused a philosophy of Pan-Africanism, black separatism and self-reliance, and the redemption of Africa from colonialism by people of African ancestry. His organization attracted attention from people of African descent around the world; his newspaper *Negro World* had at its peak a distribution of over half a million weekly. The UNIA flourished on track as the KKK flourished in the 1920s. The movement declined as internal rivalries and financial mismanagement plagued the organization in the late 1920s and early 1930s.⁵⁶⁹

Marcus Garvey had a strong following in the Philadelphia area. Philadelphia was also headquarters to another controversial charismatic black leader, the Reverend Major Jealous Divine, also known as Father Divine.⁵⁷⁰ Little is known for sure about Father Divine's early life, including his original name or place of birth, but he spent his early years preaching in the south. By 1914 he had moved to Brooklyn, where he founded the International Peace Mission Movement. After a brief, turbulent period on Long island, he moved his operations to Harlem in 1932. During the 1930s the Peace Mission became the largest African American religious movement in the urban North, with over 10,000 members across the country and in several foreign countries. In 1942 he moved to Philadelphia and in 1948 purchased the luxury apartment building, Lorraine Apartments, on North Broad street.

Offering meals, clothing, barber's services, transportation, and a place to stay at low rates, the Peace Mission Movement functioned as an agent of social welfare, micro enterprise, and civil rights. The philosophy of the Peace Mission Movement was a mix of Methodism, Pentecostal religion, self-help, and positive thinking. He and his followers considered him to embody the Second Coming of Jesus. Despite his unorthodox belief system, Father Divine was an assertive proponent of equal rights and economic independence that included the following tenets:

We believe in the cash and carry system. We do not purchase anything on credit or the installment plan ... We believe in full employments for all able bodied people. Our Churches institute free courtesy employment agencies as a direct deterrent to public welfare... We believe in serving the Cause of Humanity through

the Cooperative System, individually cooperating to purchase, own and manage hotels, apartment houses, and business places.⁵⁷¹



John Greene, a Civil War veteran, and his dogs, n.d. From the Columbia County Historical and Genealogical Society. Used with permission.

The Movement set up a network of business that provided high-quality goods and services inexpensively while also creating jobs. The Divine Peace Mission Movement has recently been held up as a model of entrepreneurial business development.⁵⁷² Father Divine has also been called the “forerunner of public housing” for the Mission’s energetic efforts to provide good housing.

The PBS series entitled *From Emancipation to Jim Crow* aptly summarized Father Divine’s cultural importance: Mainstream Americans scoffed at this small African American deity, but many in black America thought he was crazy like a fox. Father Divine used white disciples to buy property. He bought a hotel near Atlantic City, New Jersey, so that blacks could access the beach. He married white women and openly lived with them. To most of black America, he was doing things no other black man could have gotten away with.⁵⁷³

Father Divine died in 1965 and eventually most of the Mission’s businesses and properties in the city were sold, closed, or donated to charities. The Divine Lorraine closed in 1999 although the Mission continues to operate the Divine Tracy in West Philadelphia. Since 1952 the Peace Mission has been headquartered in Gladwyne.

World War II and After

World War II was a watershed in the ongoing battle for civil rights. The fight against Nazi racial supremacy and the rhetoric of liberty from tyranny that permeated the support of the war effort threw into sharp contrast the very real suppression of African Americans in the United States. The discrimination against black workers in war industries and the segregation of the Armed Forces, along with numerous instances of hate crimes in the South and on military bases cast a glaring light on the hypocrisy of America’s claim to be fighting for democracy and freedom.

During the war, African Americans made a collective decision that now was the time to push for their long-denied rights. Although Pennsylvania and other northern states lacked the legislated segregation of the South, implicit Jim Crow rules prevailed everywhere. Black Pennsylvanians

could shop in the same stores as whites and attend the same public events, but they still could not go to the same schools, stay overnight in a white hotel, swim in the same public pools, get their haircut in a white barbershop, buy or rent a home in a white neighborhood, or earn the same wages for similar work. Black Pennsylvanians were often denied entry to public establishments, relegated to sit in special sections, and made to swim in specified pools or lakes on specified dates.

With the aim of reminding Americans at home of the purpose of the fight against fascism, the black press, led by the influential *Pittsburgh Courier* launched the “Double V” campaign for “Victory at Home and Victory Abroad”—victory over discrimination and inequality at home and victory for freedom and democracy abroad.

After the war African Americans extended their efforts. The *Pittsburgh Courier*, *Philadelphia Tribune* and other influential black newspapers across the country systematically exposed the continuing discrimination and racism in American society. The *Pittsburgh Courier* ran a large headline in its November 9, 1946, edition: "What Has Happened to Equal Rights Law In Pennsylvania?" The newspaper criticized the lax enforcement of the law, asserting that, "despite hundreds of cases started in aldermen's and justices of the peace's offices, there have been few convictions and no sentences under the act".⁵⁷⁴

In 1947 Pittsburgh Urban League staffer K. Leroy Irvis led pickets to protest the refusal of downtown department stores to hire black clerks. The picketing succeeded, although Irvis lost his job due to the anger of the department stores and Pittsburgh Mayor David Lawrence. He later ran successfully for state office and became the first black Speaker of the House in the Pennsylvania Legislature. St. Francis and Montefiore Hospitals admitted blacks to their nursing schools for the first time and Montefiore was the first to grant privileges to a black physician, Dr Charles Burks. Throughout the 1950s black Pennsylvanians tirelessly used the state and federal FEPCs to highlight discrimination and expand employment opportunities, to end discriminatory policy practices by insurance companies, to open unions to more black membership, and to open decent housing opportunities.⁵⁷⁵

In May 1955 one hotel was successfully challenged to end its discriminatory practices. The challenge came through grass-roots activism, not through legal channels. The case unfolded at the Penn-McKee Hotel in McKeesport, Allegheny County, and involved the president of Pennsylvania's African American Elks and his cohorts who challenged the establishment's segregationist practices head on. Two delegations of African American Elks from Philadelphia, including the State Federation's president, Adolphus W. Anderson Sr., visited McKeesport and attempted to see if they could hold their 32nd annual state convention at the hotel. After the delegates appeared at the door in large numbers, "they were accepted graciously" by the hotel, "which threw open its doors to the convention."⁵⁷⁶



However, the calm desegregation of the Penn-McKee Hotel was unusual. Elsewhere in Pennsylvania whites resisted desegregation. Collective action in Pittsburgh and Philadelphia resulted in the desegregation of swimming pools and other public accommodations, but not without accompanying violence from whites.⁵⁷⁷ After careful planning the NAACP, Urban League, and American Friends Service Committee recruited black pioneers to try to integrate the white suburbs. On August 14, 1957, just two weeks before the Little Rock Nine tried to desegregate Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, William Myers, a World War II vet and refrigeration technician, moved with his wife Daisy, who was a school teacher, and their three children, into 43 Deepgreen Lane to desegregate Levittown in Bucks County. Anti-integrationist white neighbors reacted badly; they paraded outside the house chanting racist sentiments, burned crosses on the Myers's lawn, and sprayed KKK on the home of the Myers's Jewish neighbors. The State Police had to be sent in to protect the Myers and their supporters.

Similar scenarios caused Pittsburgh and other cities to pass fair housing ordinances, and in 1956, Governor George M. Leader signed Pennsylvania's Fair Employment Practices Act that

prohibited race-based employment discrimination. That law was amended in 1961 to prohibit discrimination in housing and education.⁵⁷⁸

There have been a great number of other tireless advocates of civil rights for African-Americans during the 20th century in Pennsylvania, including the thousands of unrecognized women who have fought for economic, political and civil rights and who were at the forefront of the struggle during the mid 20th century. Two of these significant women were Daisy Lampkin and Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander. According to a posthumous biographical sketch of Daisy Lampkin in *The Crisis*, as well as biographical accounts by Joe William Trotter and Davis W. Houck, other than being one of the “founders of the National Council of Negro Women,” and being the “first black woman elected delegate-at-large from Pennsylvania to the Republican National Convention in 1928” Lampkin was also a field secretary for the NAACP from 1935 to 1947, fighting for everything from civil, political, and economic rights to pushing for anti-lynching legislation. In fact, Lampkin was also “a vice-president of the *Pittsburgh Courier*,” and “in her position as writer, editor, and executive, she helped make the paper the top circulating black newspaper in the world by the 1950’s.” Throughout her life, while she had worked tirelessly for such broad causes throughout Pennsylvania, she was particularly connected to the Pittsburgh area, and as such, Joe Trotter refers to her as “a stellar example of black female participation in the political life of the Ohio Valley.”⁵⁷⁹

Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander (1898-1989) was born to a distinguished Philadelphia family of doctors, lawyers, civil rights activists, artists, and ministers. Such a distinguished background represented the hard-won progress that African Americans in Pennsylvania had seen over the centuries. Mossell was among the very few when she defied racial and gender conventions in 1921, and became “the first African American woman to receive a doctorate degree in economics.” However, as Nina Banks discovered, “[d]iscrimination...prevented her from working as a professor.” Like those who came before her, but with more privilege than most, Mossell Alexander was undaunted by discrimination and in 1927 achieved yet another distinction as the first black woman to graduate from the University of Pennsylvania School of Law and to pass the state bar examination. Armed with such formidable qualifications, one might think that Mossell Alexander did not need to fight for civil and political rights. She eventually joined the law firm of her husband, Raymond Alexander, which “was responsible for most of the desegregation litigation in the commonwealth of Pennsylvania.”⁵⁸⁰

Mossell Alexander was among the countless individuals who continued the tradition of fighting for civil and political rights in Pennsylvania, using her privilege and education to secure better economic conditions for African Americans, especially women. She presented her ideas and research findings to black middle-class audiences, imploring them to recognize their “duty to organize on behalf of black workers since black professionals owed their accumulated savings to the labor of the black masses.”⁵⁸¹ Mossell Alexander also was one of the early 20th century

crusaders for civil and political rights active at the national level, having been “...appointed to President Truman’s Committee on Human Rights in 1946. The committee’s report ‘To Secure These Rights’,” Banks notes, “...was one of the most important civil rights documents prior to the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act.”⁵⁸²

By the 1960s Pennsylvania’s story of civil rights exposed the tenacity of white racism and tested the limits of black patience. Through the 1950s the northern civil rights movement

maintained momentum. Successes at home and victories such as the 1954 Supreme Court decision *Brown v. Topeka, Kansas Board of Education* and the 1956 Montgomery Alabama bus boycott heartened black Pennsylvanians to continue the day to day struggle for smaller local victories. Right after the Brown decision school districts in York, Carlisle, and Steelton capitulated and abolished their separate black schools. The school district of Reading hired its first black teachers.⁵⁸³ By 1960 almost half of all black Philadelphians owned their own homes. The growth rate in the number of black professionals exceeded that of whites. However, by the end of the decade it became increasingly clear that the appearance of progress was not matched by the reality. In the South, whites made good on their promise that desegregation would result in bloodshed and violence. In the North, including Pennsylvania, white unwillingness to enforce equal rights laws or move more quickly brought frustration and anger.

Historian Thomas Sugrue relates the situation in Pennsylvania concerning the state FEPC:

A typical state FEPC law was Pennsylvania’s. Enacted in 1955 after more than ten years of lobbying and grass roots activism, it was the product of legislative compromise. Fearful of a law that would interfere with managerial prerogative, Republicans thwarted efforts to pass a state FEP law five times between 1945 and 1955, before a tepid version of the bill (emphasizing the then uncontroversial issue of “age discrimination”) passed in October. Liberals, already inclined toward gradualism, watered down the legislation to win over moderate Republicans. The law was passed in a non-election year in a session marked by unusually high absenteeism.⁵⁸⁴



African American family standing in front of a single story brick house. Photo from LancasterHistory.org. Used with permission.



Attorney Henry Smith receiving an NAACP certificate, 1940. Photo from Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh. Used with permission.

Without adequate funding or staffing the Pennsylvania FEPC could make only a token effort to resolve workplace discrimination. By 1962 the Human Relations Commission had heard 1,146 cases and ruled on behalf of the complainants in only 562.⁵⁸⁵ Black wages and employment continued to lag behind that of whites. The Pennsylvania National Guard had been desegregated in 1952, but in 1959 the Guard had only 24 black officers, fewer than when the Guard was integrated.⁵⁸⁶ Despite the attention given to school desegregation, Pennsylvania school districts

remained segregated based on the segregated patterns of housing, school systems that did integrate then fired their black teachers, and the state higher education system came under attack for slow hiring of minorities.⁵⁸⁷

In 1958 the Governor's Committee on Discrimination in Housing revealed that

Housing discrimination in Philadelphia is so vicious ... that the majority of the City's 516,000 Negroes are jammed into slum areas, unable to "buy out", and are forced to live under horrendous circumstances.⁵⁸⁸

By the end of the 1950s recognition that desegregation of housing was the key to school desegregation led to more pressure for fair housing laws, and in 1961 the Fair Housing Bill of Pennsylvania banned discrimination in the sale or rental of all dwellings. However, as Representative K. Leroy Irvis pointed out, dwellings occupied by the owner or members of the owners immediate family were exempt from the provisions of the law.⁵⁸⁹ And Governor Lawrence, when signing the bill, "declared that there would be no vigorous enforcement of the law's provisions; that the first steps would be to try to educate the public."⁵⁹⁰

By the early 1960s black Pennsylvanians were expressing their restiveness at the continued failure of the Commonwealth to resolve the fundamental racial inequality of education, housing, and employment. Editorials in the black press increasingly reflected the impatience of the

writers at both the recalcitrance of white and what the writers saw as the passiveness of many black Pennsylvanians:

For example some Negro leaders were so very happy about the fact that Senator John Kennedy called Mrs Martin Luther King to express regrets that her husband was in jail that they made campaign issue of this “nice” little gesture. This kind of froth proves that Negroes are satisfied with the froth rather than the substance of politics.... It is this kind of nonsense which blocks the progress of Negroes in politics, which prevents them from having any real power in government. ...It has been conceded that Negroes elected Governor Lawrence of Pennsylvania. The Governor has made many “nice” statements about the equality of all races. Those words have been said by politicians for a hundred years.⁵⁹¹

Black Pennsylvanians grew increasingly, publicly, impatient. “Truly,” editorialized the *Philadelphia Tribune*,

It would seem that a hundred years is long enough for Negroes to wait for the “New Day” which has been coming but never arrives.⁵⁹²

Legislative activism gave way to physical activism, as black youth in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh went south to support the sit ins and Freedom Riders and voter registration campaigns. At home they took to the picket lines outside discriminatory employers, chanting “The Only Thing That We Did Wrong Was to Let Segregation Stay So Long.”⁵⁹³ Rifts began to appear within the black community as people grew more impatient to see real progress. Dorothy Anderson, a columnist for the *Philadelphia Tribune* took a strident and sarcastic stand:

It has become increasingly apparent that many—if not most—of the so-called leaders of the colored community are only stooges for the white bosses. No one can make me believe that the learned (?), brainy (?), intellectual (?) members of the Do-Good cliques were unaware of racial tensions in the fields of housing and employment.⁵⁹⁴

Instead of having achieved their goal of equality, in the early 1960s black Pennsylvanians were facing a major new challenge in the struggle for equal rights. With the passage of the federal Civil Rights Act of 1964, the civil rights movement shifted back North and attention focused on the major problems of inner city ghettos, crime, unemployment and education. Legally the Jim

Crow Era had ended, but the economic and social problems that had been generated by the post-World War 2 transformation of American society remained.

Notes

⁵²⁶ Higginbotham, *In The Matter of Color*, 280-29; Turner, *The Negro in Pennsylvania*, 5-12; Wright, *The Negro in Pennsylvania*, 1-13; Merle Gerald Brouwer. *The Negro as a Slave and as a Free Black in Colonial Pennsylvania*. Master's Thesis, Wayne State University, 1973.

⁵²⁷ Ibid.

⁵²⁸ Turner, *The Negro in Pennsylvania*, 110-111.

⁵²⁹ Paul Crawford, "A Footnote on Courts for Trial of Negroes in Colonial Pennsylvania," *Journal of Black Studies*, Vol. 5 no. 2, 167-174.

⁵³⁰ "An Act For the Gradual Abolition of Slavery," Record Group 26: Records of the Department of State, Engrossed Laws; Gary B. Nash and Jean R. Soderlund, *Freedom By Degrees*, 137-166; Philip S. Foner, "A Plea Against Re-enslavement, *Pennsylvania History*, Vol. 39, no.2, 239-241; Stanley I. Kutler, "Pennsylvania Courts, The Abolition Act, and Negro Rights," *Pennsylvania History*, Vol. 30, no.1, 14-27.

⁵³¹ Ibid; Charles H. Wesley, "Negro Suffrage in the Period of Constitution Making, 1787-1865," *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 32, no. 2, 143-168; Edward Price, "The Black Voting Rights Issue in Pennsylvania, 1780-1900," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 100, no.3, 356-373.

⁵³² Leon F. Litwack, *North of Slavery, The Negro in the Free States, 1790-1860*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961, 15-18.

⁵³³ Julie Winch, "The Making and Meaning of James Forten's *Letters from a Man of Colour*" in VOL LXIV no. 1 *William and Mary Quarterly* letter 2.

⁵³⁴ Carl Oblinger, *Black History and Culture*, Harrisburg: PHMC, 1977; See also http://www.afrolumens.org/rising_free/register.html.

⁵³⁵ Turner, *The Negro in Pennsylvania*, 145-153; W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study*, New York, Lippincott, 1899, 25-45.

⁵³⁶ Bella Gross, "The First Annual Negro Convention," *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 31, no. 4, 435-443; John W. Cromwell, "The Early Negro Convention Movement," *The American Negro Academy*, Occasional Papers no. 9, Washington D.C.: Academy, 1904, 3-20; Howard Holman Bell, ed., *Minutes of the Proceedings of the National Negro Conventions, 1830-1864*. New York: Arno Press, 1969; Benjamin Brawley, *A Social History of the American Negro*, New York: Cosimo, 2005. (Reprint of 1921 Edition), 186-188; Herbert Aptheker, ed., *A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States*, New York: Citadel Press, 1951, 105-115; Winch, *Philadelphia's Black Elite*.

- ⁵³⁷ Ibid; "To the Free People of Colour of These United States," in Aptheker, ed., *A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States*, 105-107.
- ⁵³⁸ Ibid; *Minutes and Proceedings of the First Annual Convention of the People of Color Held by Adjournments in this City of Philadelphia, from the sixth to the eleventh of June, inclusive, 1831*. Philadelphia: Published by order of the Committee of Arrangements, 1831; Glasco, *The WPA History of the Negro in Pittsburgh*; Quarles, *Black Abolitionists*, 25-35; Howard H. Bell, *Free Negroes of the North, 1830-1835: A Study in National Cooperation* *The Journal of Negro Education*, Vol. 26, No. 4 (Autumn, 1957), pp. 447-455.
- ⁵³⁹ Aptheker, *A Documentary History*, 143; Abraham Shadd, "Conventional Address: To the Free Coloured Inhabitants of the United States," Philadelphia: s.n., 1833, *American Broad-sides and Ephemera*, Series 1, no. 4465; Leon Litwack and August Meier, eds., *Black Leaders of the 19th Century*, 87-90.
- ⁵⁴⁰ Edward Price, "The Black Voting Rights Issue in Pennsylvania, 1780-1900," 356-373; Eric Ledell-Smith, "The End of Black Voting Rights in Pennsylvania: African Americans and the Pennsylvania Constitutional Convention of 1837-38." *Pennsylvania History*. Volume 65 Number 3 (Summer 1998), 279- 299. Frank W. Sweet, *Legal History of the Color Line* Palm Coast Florida: Backintyme Publishing, 2005, 332-336; Du Bois *Philadelphia Negro*, 30-31.
- ⁵⁴¹ "An Appeal of Forty Thousand Citizens Threatened with Disfranchisement, to the People of Pennsylvania," in Richard Newman, *Pamphlets of Protest: An Anthology of Early African-American Protest Literature, 1790-1860*, 131-143; Glasco, ed., *WPA History of the Negro*, 178-183; Anthony B. Pinn, ed., *African-American Religious Cultures*, ABC-CLIO, 2009, 39-46.
- ⁵⁴² Philip S. Foner and George E. Walker. *Proceedings of the Black National and State Conventions, 1840-1865 Vol.1*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1979; Levine, *Martin R. Delany*, 25-26; R.J.M. Blackett, *Thomas Morris Chester*, 11; Samuel Williams, *Four Years in Liberia: A Sketch of the Life of the Rev. Samuel Williams*, Philadelphia: King and Baird, 1857; Glasco, *WPA History of the Negro*, 61; Joe William Trotter and Eric Ledell Smith, *African-Americans in Pennsylvania: Shifting Historical Perspectives*, 98, 118; Aptheker, *A Documentary Reader*, 138.
- ⁵⁴³ "To the Colored Freemen of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania," in S.S. Schmucker, *Retrospect of Lutheranism in the United States*, Baltimore, Publication Rooms, 1841, 43-56.
- ⁵⁴⁴ *Minutes of the State Convention of the Colored Citizens Pennsylvania, Convened at Harrisburg, December 13th and 14th, 1848*. Philadelphia: Merrihew and Thompson, 1849; See also Philip S. Foner and George E. Walker. *Proceedings of the Black National and State Conventions*; Charles Blockson, *Pennsylvania's Black History*, Philadelphia: Portfolio Associates, 1975, 47; Switala, *Underground Railroad*, 146, Blockson, *Underground Railroad*, 213; Ripley, *The Black Abolitionist Papers*, 483.
- ⁵⁴⁵ *Minutes of the State Convention*, 1-11.
- ⁵⁴⁶ Ibid., 11-21.
- ⁵⁴⁷ Hugh Davis, "The Pennsylvania State Equal Rights League and the Northern Black Struggle for Legal Equality, 1864-1877." In *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* Vol CXXVI no. 4

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- ⁵⁵¹ Ira V. Brown, "Pennsylvania and the Rights of the Negro, 1865-1887" *Pennsylvania History*. Volume 28 Number 1 (January 1961), 45-57; Davis, "The Pennsylvania State Equal Rights League,"; *Williamsport Gazette and Bulletin*, April 27, 1870; *Franklin Repository and Transcript*, May 1, 1870; *Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 27, 1870, p.1.
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- ⁵⁵⁹ *West Chester Daily Local News* Aug. 16, 1911; *Pittsburgh Courier*, Aug 19, 1911; *New York Age*, Many Sermons on Lynching, Aug. 24, 1911; *Richmond Planet*, "Work of the Mob" Aug. 19, 1911; Eric Ledell Smith, "['Asking for Justice and Fair Play': African American State Legislators and Civil](#)

[Rights in Early 20th-Century Pennsylvania](#)," *Pennsylvania History*. Volume 63 [Number 2](#) (April 1996), 169-203.

⁵⁶⁰ Leroy Hopkins and Eric Ledell Smith, *The African Americans in Pennsylvania*. (The Peoples of Pennsylvania Pamphlet No. 6) Harrisburg: PHMC, 1994, 3; *Crisis*, Vol 2. No. 5 (September 1911), 195.

⁵⁶¹ *New York Times*, 12-13-1911.

⁵⁶² *Ibid*.

⁵⁶³ Quoted in review of *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North* NY: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2009 in bookreporter.com.

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⁵⁶⁵ *Ibid*.

⁵⁶⁶ I. Maximilian Martin, "The Pennsylvania Civil Rights Act," *The Crisis*, November 1935, 341.

⁵⁶⁷ Emerson Hunsberger Loucks, *The Ku Klux Klan in Pennsylvania: A Study in Nativism*, (Harrisburg, The Telegraph Press, 1936), 30-31.

⁵⁶⁸ Richard E. Harris, *Politics and Prejudice: A History of Chester, Pa., Negroes*, Chester: Relmo Publishers, 1991; For a look at the Ku Klux Klan's rise to prominence in Pennsylvania, see Philip Jenkins' *Hoods and Shirts: The Extreme Right in Pennsylvania, 1925-1950*, Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1997.

⁵⁶⁹ <http://marcusgarvey.com/>

⁵⁷⁰ Information regarding Father Divine was taken from the National Register of Historic Places nomination for the Lorraine Apartments Hotel (listed 2002), prepared by Domenic Vitiello, 2002.

⁵⁷¹ www.libertynet.org/fdipmn/tenets/economtx.html

⁵⁷² John Trinkaus, Alvin Puryear, and Joseph A. Giacalone, "Father Divine and the Development of African American Small Business," *Journal of Developmental Entrepreneurship*, Volume 5, #3(December 2000).

⁵⁷³ "This Far by Faith, 1866-1945" in *From Emancipation to Jim Crow*, PBS, <http://www.pbs.org/thisfarbyfaith/journey/3/p10.html>, accessed 12/7/0/2010.

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- ⁵⁷⁷ "Police Thwart Mobs at Pools," *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 28, 1952, p1. "Battle Private Club Gimmick in Rink Case," *Pittsburgh Courier*, November 28, 1953, p1.
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- ⁵⁷⁹ Joe William Trotter, *River Jordan: African-American Urban Life in the Ohio Valley*, Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1998, 136; *The Crisis*, December 1980, 565; *Women and the Civil Rights Movement, 1954-1965*, Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2009, 33-36.
- ⁵⁸⁰ Nina Banks, "Black Women and Racial Advancement: The Economics of Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander" *Review of Black Political Economy* 33, #1 (September 2005): 9-10, 13.
- ⁵⁸¹ Banks, 18. This view differs from that presented by Frederic Miller, "The Black Migration to Philadelphia: A 1924 Profile" in Trotter and Ledell Smith, eds., *African Americans in Pennsylvania: Shifting Historical Perspectives*, 294-95. Miller asserts that Mossell's view of migrants from the South was more pessimistic than whites.
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- ⁵⁹² Ibid.
- ⁵⁹³ "The Only Thing That We Did Wrong Was To Let Segregation Stay So Long," *Philadelphia Tribune*, May 28, 1963, p 6.
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